



East Suffolk House, Riduna Park, Station Road,
Melton, Woodbridge, Suffolk, IP12 1RT

Scrutiny Committee

Members:

Councillor Stuart Bird (Chairman)
Councillor Mike Deacon (Vice-Chairman)
Councillor Edward Back
Councillor David Beavan
Councillor Judy Cloke
Councillor Linda Coulam
Councillor Andree Gee
Councillor Louise Gooch
Councillor Tracey Green
Councillor Colin Hedgley
Councillor Geoff Lynch
Councillor Keith Robinson
Councillor Caroline Topping

Members are invited to a **Meeting of the Scrutiny Committee** to be held in the Deben Conference Room, East Suffolk House, on **Thursday, 19 May 2022 at 6.30pm.**

This meeting will be broadcast to the public via the East Suffolk YouTube Channel at <https://youtu.be/0Ijz43paOrU>

An Agenda is set out below.

Part One – Open to the Public

Pages

-
- 1 Apologies for Absence and Substitutions**
To receive apologies for absence.

2 Declarations of Interest

Members and Officers are invited to make any declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary or Local Non-Pecuniary Interests that they may have in relation to items on the Agenda and are also reminded to make any declarations at any stage during the Meeting if it becomes apparent that this may be required when a particular item or issue is considered.

3 Minutes

To confirm as a correct record the Minutes of the meetings held on the 20 January 2022, 17 February 2022 and 17 March 2022 (minutes to follow).

Minutes January 2022 1 - 9

Minutes February 2022 10 - 21

4 The impact of flexible working on the workforce, council resources and productivity ES/1154 22 - 49

Report of the Leader of the Council.

5 Scrutiny Committee's Forward Work Programme 50 - 51

To consider the Scrutiny Committee's Forward Work Programme.

Part Two – Exempt/Confidential

There are no exempt or confidential items for this agenda.

Close



Stephen Baker, Chief Executive

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Unconfirmed



Minutes of a Meeting of the **Scrutiny Committee** held in the Deben Conference Room, East Suffolk House, on **Thursday, 20 January 2022 at 6:30 PM**

Members of the Committee present:

Councillor David Beavan, Councillor Stuart Bird, Councillor Linda Coulam, Councillor Colin Hedgley, Councillor Geoff Lynch, Councillor Keith Robinson, Councillor Caroline Topping

Other Members present:

Councillor Peter Byatt, Councillor Maurice Cook, Councillor Ray Herring, Councillor Richard Kerry

Officers present: Sarah Davis (Democratic Services Officer), Matt Makin (Democratic Services Officer), Brian Mew (Chief Finance Officer & Section 151 Officer), Lorraine Rogers (Deputy Chief Finance Officer), Julian Sturman (Specialist Accountant – Capital and Treasury Management), Heather Tucker (Head of Housing), Amber Welham (Finance Business Partner - Housing)

Others present: Councillor Louise Gooch (Observer via Zoom)

1 Apologies for Absence and Substitutions

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Back, Cloke, Deacon, Gee and Gooch. Councillor Byatt was in attendance as a substitute for Councillor Gooch.

2 Declarations of Interest

There were no Declarations of Interest.

3 Minutes

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting held on 16 December 2021 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

4 Capital Programme 2022/23 to 2025/26

The Committee received report **ES/1019** of Councillor Cook, the Cabinet Member with responsibility for Resources, which set out the programme of capital expenditure for the financial year 2022/23 to 2025/26, including revisions to 2021/22.

Councillor Cook explained the principles behind the capital programme which were to maintain affordability across the four years of the plan, ensure capital resources were aligned with the Strategic Plan, maximise resources through external funding and asset disposal, and not to anticipate receipts until they were realised.

Councillor Cook reported that the general fund capital programme totalled £262 million, and included £161 million of external contributions and grants, which represented 61% of the whole general fund capital programme. Following review and scrutiny of the capital programme by the Asset Management Group, Corporate Management Team and Strategic Management Team, Cabinet had reviewed the programme on the 4 January and recommended approval by Full Council at its next meeting on the 26 January.

The Housing Revenue Account capital programme totalled £78 million and included £4 million in external grants and contributions.

Councillor Cook explained the options for the funding of capital expenditure, either from external sources such as government grants, the Council's own resources and reserves, or debt. Debt was only a temporary source of finance and would be replaced over time by other financing, usually from revenue, which was known as Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP). Debt could also be repaid through the sale of capital assets. The Council's cumulative outstanding debt was measured by the Capital Financing Requirement (CFR).

Councillor Cook reported that the CFR was expected to increase by £72 million between 2021/22 and 2025/26 due to capital projects potentially being financed through borrowing. In the medium term debt was expected to remain below the CFR, but the scale of the current Capital Programme meant that the Council would begin to approach its borrowing limits over the life of the programme if other sources of finance were not available.

Councillor Cook confirmed that the programme did not pre-empt capital receipts, although some significant receipts were expected, and the financing of the programme would be revised when these were received. External funding was expected to be secured for other major projects in the plan, which would further improve the financial position in the longer term.

The Chairman invited questions.

Councillor Hedgley referred to the contributions figures detailed in the summary table of Appendix A and asked what these included. The Chief Finance Officer confirmed that these referred to third party financing, excluding grants. The two contributions in the table showed financing for coastal protection and a regeneration scheme where another organisation was providing a contribution to the project costs.

Councillor Beavan referred to borrowing limits and asked if project revenue could be used to reduce debt in this case. Councillor Cook confirmed that projects would potentially bring an asset value and income, but that income did not necessarily mean that borrowing was reduced. Borrowing would still have to be paid off over the project's life.

Councillor Beavan shared a slide comparing this Council's Housing Revenue Account capital financing against reserves with that of neighbouring Councils. Compared to other Councils, East Suffolk had very little capital expenditure, and whilst this was a prudent accounting position it did mean that there was room to invest in housing. Councillor Cook responded that whilst there were two funds, limits were cumulative across both funds. Emphasis had been placed on spending in the general fund as opposed to the housing fund as these projects would produce an asset base and income that could secure investment for housing. Councillor Kerry, Cabinet Member with responsibility for Housing, added that housing stock would be invested in as part of the Council's environmental programme but that these projects were not yet ready, and environmental solutions and costs were still being worked on. Until these projects were ready to go there would be less capital spending in housing than in the general fund. Councillor Kerry confirmed that housing targets had been discussed previously by the Cabinet and Council, and there were plans to build 176 new properties in the next three years.

Councillor Beavan stated that housing was one of the most important roles of the Council, and that there should not be a choice between building new properties and investing in existing stock to raise environmental standards. If an asset made money, it was a prudent investment which would contribute to the Council's funds, and housing was a very low risk investment compared to the building of other assets. Councillor Cook responded that there was a limit to amount the Council could borrow to fund housing building and other projects, and therefore it was necessary to prioritise some projects over others. Councillor Kerry added that at present the Council was updating existing housing stock and money was being borrowed to fund this. The total cost had not been confirmed but it would cost multiple millions, and until the Council was clearer on how much would need to be borrowed for housing refurbishment it would not be sensible to borrow more money for house building. Councillor Kerry confirmed that no more money would be borrowed to increase housing stock until the whole housing revenue account had been evaluated.

Councillor Byatt, referring to the need to update the existing housing stock, asked what would be done with properties which could not be bought up to standard. Councillor Byatt added that right to buy did affect housing stock and asked what was being done with regards to this. Councillor Kerry responded that there may be one or two properties which could not be bought up to standard, but no decisions on this had been made yet. In respect of right to buy, the Council did fully utilise all receipts, and would be in a deficit in the near future if more receipts were not realised.

Councillor Byatt referred to the Towns Fund project and asked what the timescales were for the completion of a business case. Councillor Byatt also referred to the Felixstowe Beach Huts and Lowestoft Station and asked for an update on these projects. The Chief Finance Officer confirmed that business cases for the Towns Fund had to be submitted to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities by

the end of March, and so the business case would be received by Cabinet at their March meeting, and this report would include an update on Lowestoft Station. With regards to the Felixstowe Beach Huts, the project had been moved to September but would still be delivered in this programme.

Councillor Byatt expressed concern over increasing costs for the East Point Pavilion and asked whether any further costs were anticipated. Councillor Cook responded that costs had increased for all projects, and this was being monitored. Officers added that the increased costs had been due to the shortage of construction materials, but that work had now started and no additional increases were anticipated.

The Chairman referred to the replacement of streetlighting within the report, and asked whether all replacement lights would be LED. Officers responded that this was the case and that the lights could also be turned off to save power.

The Chairman referred to recent changes in interest rates and asked how the Council was planning for this in their budget. Officers confirmed that they consulted with external treasury advisors and had applied a percentage increase based on increases in previous years. Officers did try and ensure that any borrowing was at a fixed rate so that debt repayments could be accurately accounted for.

In addition, Councillor Robinson referred to changing rates of inflation and the potential for the Bank of England base rate to change, and asked whether there was a sufficient safety net in the current budgets. Councillor Cook responded that an increase in the base rate did often reduce borrowing, but it would also increase investment rates and so there was a need to balance between the two. Officers did provide weekly summaries of interest rates and movement on the Councils accounts so that the situation could be monitored closely and quickly reacted to. The Council did also have reserves which provided an additional safety net.

Councillor Lynch informed the meeting that the borrowing limit was approved by the Audit and Governance Committee, and that the Audit and Governance Committee were also advised on interest on investments. Councillor Lynch added that the Council did not have the ability to borrow over a thirty year period as had been suggested for housing, and that some Councils had run into difficulties with regards to borrowing for housing projects which had negatively impacted their ability to borrow.

Councillor Beavan commented that in such a period of uncertainty on interest rates and inflation, it was key that the Government set out a funding programme for a period of three to four years as soon as possible to provide some security.

Councillor Beavan proposed an additional recommendation to the report, that the Cabinet investigate whether it would be prudent to build an extra fifty houses per year in addition to borrowing to improve existing housing stock. The additional recommendation was seconded by Councillor Byatt.

Councillor Lynch stated that this item was to consider the Capital Programme and budget, not to amend or change the budget. The Committee could either approve the budget or not, it could not make amendments to the budget.

On a vote of five against and three for, the amendment did not pass.

On the proposal of the Chairman, seconded by Councillor Coulam and by majority vote it was

RESOLVED

That the Scrutiny Committee reviews and comments upon the Capital Programme and the Cabinet recommendations as set out below;

1. That the General Fund capital programme for 2021/22 to 2025/26 including revisions as shown in Appendix B be recommended for approval by Full Council.
2. That the Housing Revenue Account capital programme for 2021/22 to 2025/26 including revisions as shown in Appendix G be recommended for approval by Full Council

5 Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Budget Report 2022/23 to 2025/26

The Committee receive report **ES/1021** of Councillor Cook, Cabinet Member with responsibility for Resources and Councillor Kerry, the Cabinet Member with responsibility for Housing, which set out the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Budget for 2022/23 to 2025/26, including a forecasted position for 2021/22 and a summary of its reserves and balances.

Councillor Cook introduced the report and explained that 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.

Councillor Cook reported that under the new 2020 Rent Standard, Local Authorities could increase rents by up to CPI plus 1%. The September CPI value, 3.1%, would be used, giving the Council the option to increase rents by up to 4.1%. Social rents were based on a formula rent set by government and Affordable rents were set based on the Local Housing Allowance. The proposed rent gave an average weekly rent of £92.19 for 2022/23, which was an increase of £1.97 compared to 2021/22. Service charges 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.

The Chairman invited questions.

Councillor Topping thanked the finance team for increasing apprenticeship spaces by seven in East Suffolk.

The Chairman referred to staffing within the housing portfolio and asked whether a business case was being put together to consider whether it was appropriate to have a full time empty homes officer. Councillor Kerry confirmed that this was still being investigated as part of a wider investigation into staffing levels within the team. A report would be received by the Cabinet in due course.

Councillor Byatt asked whether the impact of increasing fuel and energy costs on tenants was being considered and what provisions were being made for those tenants who had to choose between heat and rent payments. Councillor Kerry stated that the Council had the best rent arrears figures since 2016, which currently stood at 2.87%, due to the software used by the team allowing officers to engage with those most in need. The Head of Housing added that authorities across Suffolk were working together to assist residents who were experiencing financial hardship as quickly as possible. Councillor Byatt stated that he had many positive reports on the housing team from within his ward.

The Chairman referred to the figures for provision for bad debt, budgeted for 5% of income, and asked what could be done to reduce this. Officers confirmed that although this figure was higher than previous years, it was lower than many other Councils. Officers did generally take a cautious approach and looked at the worst case scenario and it was hoped that the full budget would not be needed for bad debt provision.

Councillor Topping referred to the tenants portal mentioned in the report and asked how successful this had been. The Head of Housing confirmed that around 10% of tenants were signed up and the team were encouraging more to register, and that more functionality would be added to the system in future to allow tenants more control and visibility of their tenancy. The system was working well as it allowed tenants to be more flexible and have more insight into their rent accounts.

The Chairman asked how the housing team verified tenants income and how often this was assessed, as there was provision to charge full market rent for properties where tenants income was above £60,000 and it seemed that no one within East Suffolk's estate met this requirement. The Head of Housing confirmed that the administrative task of assessing income on an annual basis was significant and that it would not be cost effective to do this for only a small change in rents. The Head of Housing also confirmed that there were no other authorities who did this due to the administrative burden. Income was assessed at the point of application, and there were varying income thresholds which changed depending on the size of property required.

Councillor Lynch asked if there was any backlog in repairs and maintenance due to the pandemic, and asked if the budgeted figures were enough. In addition were any repairs or significant upgrades taken into account into the cost of property under right to buy. The Head of Housing confirmed that the amount allocated for repairs would be monitored on a monthly and quarterly basis. With regards to right to buy, a number of assessments were carried out to inform both the valuation of the property based on the current condition, and any discounts based on future repair schedules.

The Chairman referred to increasing costs of materials for repairs and asked how this was managed by the Council. The Head of Housing confirmed that cost rises were impacting the costs of repairs and maintenance. Contracts were in place to help manage this, but the impact was being felt across the board.

There being no further questions, on the proposal of Councillor Robinson, seconded by Councillor Hedgley and by a majority vote it was

RESOLVED

That the Scrutiny Committee, having reviewed and commented upon the Housing Revenue Account Budget Report and the Cabinet recommendations;

1. Note the HRA budget for 2022/23, and the indicative figures for 2023/24 to 2025/26;
2. Note the revised outturn position for 2021/22;
3. Note the movements in HRA Reserves and Balances;
4. Note the proposed rent increase of up to 4.1% (September 2021 CPI + 1%) as per the Rent Standard 2020.
5. Note the service charges and associated fees for 2022/23;
6. Note 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.
7. Note the changes affecting public and private sector housing and welfare;
8. Note the effects of COVID-19 to the HRA.

6 General Fund Budget and Council Tax Report 2022-23

The Committee receive report **ES/1020** of Councillor Cook, the Cabinet Member with responsibility for Resources. Councillor Cook introduced the report which provided the General Fund Budget for 2022/23 and the updated Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) as of January 2022. THE MTFS had been considered by Committee at their December 2021 meeting but had since been revised to include the Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement announced in December 2021.

Councillor Cook explained that the Provisional Settlement was generally favourable to local government and the Council. Other grant funding, including the Revenue Support Grant and the Rural Services Delivery Grant would also continue into the next year, with no significant change from current year funding levels. The Council's advantageous position on business rates had also been maintained for another year.

Councillor Cook stated that the Council Tax base was an improved position for 2022/23, with growth at 1.93% compared to previous forecasts of 1%. The Provisional Settlement confirmed no change to the referendum limit for Council Tax which 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 which would generate £440,000 of income.

Councillor Cook concluded that the report presented a balanced position for the current year and next year, which would be achieved by a combination of additional income, savings, and use of reserves. Budget gaps would however remain in future years of the MTFS due to significant uncertainty around local government finance reforms. It was likely that a combination of action would need to be introduced over the coming year to ensure a longer term sustainable position, including a phased use of reserves, maximising income and achievement of savings.

The Chairman invited questions.

The Chairman referred to planned increase in Business Rate Retention which had been reduced from 75% to 50% and asked whether this would impact the budget. Councillor Cook confirmed that as this change was still being discussed when the budget had been

set, it had not been included as the figure was not certain. The Chief Finance Officer confirmed that there was a great deal of uncertainty in local government finance from 2023/24 onwards and the planned consultation on these changes would need examining to provide longer term security.

The Chairman asked what impact the increase in minimum wage would have on the Councils budgets. The Chief Finance Officer confirmed that no directly employed Council staff were on minimum wage. The Deputy Chief Finance Officer confirmed that there was an impact through partner organisations, such as Norse and the leisure facilities, where staff were employed on minimum wage and the impact would be around £20,000-£30,000 but this increase was being absorbed in the contracts with these companies.

In response to a question from Councillor Beavan on salary increases and negotiations, the Deputy Chief Finance Officer confirmed that pay increases were agreed at a national level and the Council was then informed of what this change would be. Nothing had been confirmed for the next year, but the Council generally budgeted for a 2% increase.

Councillor Byatt referred to Appendix A3 and asked whether funding for Communities Officers and Funding Officers would continue, and whether the Wi-Fi implementation for market towns had been completed. In reference to Appendix A6 and A7 Councillor Byatt asked what plans there were for Covid reserves over the next few years. The Deputy Chief Finance Officer confirmed that with regards to Appendix A3 this showed the use of the NHB Reserve to fund communities initiatives and any apparent end dates were a result of budgets being set over particular project timelines rather than the timeframe of the MTFS. With regards to Covid funding the reserve held funding received from the government in anticipation of extra cost pressures on local government and for business rate relief. Central government had allowed the collection fund deficit to be spread over a number of years resulting in the reserves from this fund also being spent over a number of years, it was not the case that the Council was expecting further Covid costs in the next year. The Chief Finance Officer added that there was very little bad debt associated with this funding, as the Council was distributing on behalf of the government.

Councillor Topping asked whether the finance team would consider using reserves as a temporary solution to close the funding gap as had been suggested in the resident survey at Appendix B. The Chief Finance Officer stated that the use of reserves to enable transition to a more sustainable financial position would be important over the next few years, and the Council had built up reserves to enable this to be done.

The Chairman noted that funding and grant receipt was very complicated due to the number of ways it was received, and asked if this could be simplified. The Chief Finance Officer confirmed that there would be a review of local government finance this year, which would hopefully simplify some of the funding mechanisms and combine some of the smaller grants received.

Councillor Gooch referred to the residents survey in Appendix B, particularly the questions regarding the environment, and asked whether increased requirements under the Environment Bill had been factored into the budget. Councillor Cook stated

that the Council could not budget for something until it was clear what budget would be needed and the outcomes of the Environment Bill were still uncertain. The Cabinet Member with responsibility for the Environment generally argued that any spending for improved carbon emissions was cost neutral due to savings down the line and the increase income in this area from carbon neutral industry such as offshore wind farms. The Chief Finance Officer confirmed that central government had promised funding for the implementation of the Environment Bill, but further details were needed.

There being no further questions, on the proposal of Councillor Hedgley and seconded by Councillor Robinson it was by a unanimous vote

RESOLVED

That the Scrutiny Committee reviews and makes recommendations to Cabinet on the following Cabinet recommendations;

1. Approves the 2022/23 General Fund Revenue Budget as set out in this report and summarised in Appendix A6 and notes the budget forecast for 2023/24 and beyond;
2. Approves the Reserves and Balances movements as presented in Appendix A7; and
3. Approves a proposed Band D Council Tax for East Suffolk Council of £176.22 for 2022/23, an increase of £4.95 or 2.89%.

7 Scrutiny Committee's Forward Work Programme

The Scrutiny Committee received and reviewed its current forward work programme. The Chairman reported that the work programme format was being reviewed going forward and that the Committee would be updated in due course on these changes.

The meeting concluded at 8.23pm.

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Chairman

Unconfirmed



Minutes of a Meeting of the **Scrutiny Committee** held in the Conference Room, Riverside, on
Thursday, 17 February 2022 at 6.30pm

Members of the Committee present:

Councillor David Beavan, Councillor Stuart Bird, Councillor Linda Coulam, Councillor Andree Gee, Councillor Louise Gooch, Councillor Colin Hedgley, Councillor Geoff Lynch

Other Members present:

Councillor Peter Byatt, Councillor Tony Cooper, Councillor Mary Rudd, Councillor Letitia Smith

Officers present: Sarah Davis (Democratic Services Officer), Nick Khan (Strategic Director), Peter Langford (District Emergency Planning Officer), Nicole Rickard (Head of Communities) and Nicola Wotton (Deputy Democratic Services Manager).

Others present: Chris Abraham (CAS), Maddie Baker-Woods (Ipswich and East Suffolk CCG) and Ben Hogston (Norfolk & Waveney CCG).

1 Apologies for Absence and Substitutions

Apologies were received from Councillors Back, Cloke, Deacon, Green, Robinson and Topping. Councillors Byatt and Cooper attended as substitutes for Councillors Deacon and Robinson respectively.

2 Declarations of Interest

There were no Declarations of Interest.

3 Review of Covid-19

Councillor Rudd, the Cabinet Member with responsibility for Community Health and Councillor Smith, Cabinet Member with responsibility for Communities, Leisure and Tourism gave a brief introduction to their report ES/1058.

Peter Langford, the District Emergency Planning Officer (DEPO) explained that Community Emergency Planning fell within the remit of the Joint Emergency Planning Unit (JEPU) and was an initiative set up in the mid 2000's. He added that it had been given impetus before the pandemic by a Lottery Fund grant which enabled it to be extended into communities. The Committee noted that it was largely based on Town and Parish Councils who formed a pool of volunteers which the JEPU could then communicate with in the event of an incident or emergency. The Parish Council would

then generally have a plan on what they were going to do and they, as well as other community volunteers, would support the emergency services. The DEPO stressed that volunteers were not asked to respond to the incident directly but the JEPUs could use their village halls and community centres to house evacuees, as well as use their local knowledge on who was the most vulnerable in their community. The DEPO explained that the JEPUs had communicated with volunteers directly at the start of the pandemic but then the Collaborative Communities Board had communicated with them. Now we were in the Covid recovery phase, the JEPUs were contacting volunteers directly again eg Storms Dudley and Eunice messages had been sent directly through Emergency Planning Groups. He added that the team currently communicated with around 57 groups in East Suffolk and, of these, 44 had a plan with emergency contact details that were reviewed annually. The remainder might be thinking of having a plan or be a group that previously had a plan but the volunteers had moved on.

Councillor Beavan queried if it was possible to build on community resilience amongst vulnerable people in their accommodation. The DEPO responded that the JEPUs focussed on responding in an emergency and, whilst they did look at what resilience there was, this was not really the role of JEPUs. He added that they did work alongside partners who worked with those vulnerable people in the community and, although it would not be JEPUs doing it, they would like to tap into any community resilience and understand what that community resilience was.

Councillor Hedgley queried if every Parish Council had a designated emergency person and plan and if not was this what the JEPUs were aiming for. The DEPO responded that most did not and their biggest challenge was that someone left and enthusiasm for a plan dropped. He added that he would like to see every Town and Parish Council having a plan but he feared they were a long way off that. Councillor Hedgley queried if a statutory law that each Parish Council should have an emergency contact and plan would help. The DEPO explained that the Government was looking at reviewing emergency planning but he did not think they would get to a point where every Parish Council would be required to have a plan.

In response to the Chairman's request for clarification that not all 57 Community Emergency Planning Groups in East Suffolk had a plan, the DEPO stated that a lot of parishes had agreed to have a contact who could be contacted in an emergency and would cascade information out but that was different to having a plan.

Councillor Gooch referred to the map in the report and the DEPO clarified that it was easier to convince coastal parishes that had a direct threat to have a plan but it was more difficult to convince others. He explained that Lowestoft Town Council had agreed to have a plan but it was more difficult for them to create one because of the social dynamics of being a large town, whereas it was easier for parishes because everyone tended to identify with the area and the Parish Council. Councillor Gooch pointed out that, given the DEPO's comment, there appeared to be a large gap along coastal areas between Southwold and Lowestoft. The DEPO stated Southwold used to have an active emergency planning group but people moved on and the JEPUs were currently trying to reinvigorate Southwold volunteers with those in Reydon for a combined group and several had attended recent training.

Councillor Byatt queried how quickly data protection requirements were lifted in an emergency and the DEPO explained that, if an Emergency Incident was declared, all the agencies would come together to create a list so information would be shared, especially in relation to vulnerable residents. He added that one might occur this weekend due to the storms but if not then a large exercise would be held later in the year to practice. Councillor Byatt then queried what Councillors should do in an emergency and the DEPO responded that he and Councillor Rudd would be meeting shortly to discuss several matters including further training for Councillors.

Councillor Bird queried if parishes were too small a structure to deal with emergencies and the DEPO stressed that Parish Councils were not being asked to respond to emergencies but to provide additional support eg rest centres and working with emergency services when they arrived on the identification of vulnerable people.

Councillor Gooch stated that rest centre training had been offered to Members at a training session in 2019 but it had not taken place. The DEPO clarified that he had been suggesting an updated version of the 2019 My Role in an Emergency Councillor training, however, the first rest centre training for community planning groups and volunteers since Covid had been held this week and further sessions would be held later in the year if Councillors wanted to attend.

Councillor Hedgley stated that his parish had used the template and identified potential emergencies but he was concerned that a large town such as Woodbridge did not have a plan. The DEPO repeated that it was always more difficult for towns to create a plan due to the fact that volunteers did not always identify with the Town Council or some community groups identified with a particular issue in their area and did not always want to be moved under a Town or Parish Council.

The Chairman welcomed the invited guests to the meeting and firstly asked Chris Abraham, Chief Executive of Community Action Suffolk to give a brief introduction to the Voluntary Sector element of the report.

Chris reminded Members of the size and scope of the voluntary sector within East Suffolk and it was noted that there were over 6000 registered organisations such as charities and not for profit organisations, and many more unregistered groups totalling roughly 15,000 voluntary sector organisations in Suffolk. CAS had produced a state of the sector report in 2020 which detailed such things as the number of volunteers, turnover and the types of work they were involved in, and Chris explained that this would be refreshed in 2022 to understand more about the positive and negative impact that Covid had on the sector. She added that, throughout Covid, CAS had undertaken a number of surveys of the sector who initially had been really worried about financial sustainability because services were shut down and were not able to operate their activities, however, throughout the pandemic things changed and the outlook had become more positive due to business grants, the furlough scheme and other emergency and additional funding, including the funding East Suffolk Council had made available to those groups.

Councillor Lynch arrived at 7.05pm.

Chris continued that advice around funding and grants was not new as it had been available before the pandemic and she suggested that the level of groups now seeking funding was back at pre-pandemic levels. She stated that the surveys had also given an insight into the rapid digitalisation the sector had gone through with staff working from home, meeting clients and moving more generally to online services, however, it had become clear that there was a growing demand for their services and some individuals were presenting with much more complex needs. The key challenge for the voluntary sector was the number of volunteers not returning to the roles they had been doing before the pandemic which had resulted in some charity shops closing and some activities not fully restarting. The Committee was informed that a new volunteering brokerage website was available which, although still called Volunteer Suffolk, was now much more intuitive than the old website and volunteers could record information about their volunteering including hours, placements etc and volunteer managers could keep records such as DBS and training which enabled passporting of volunteers. Chris added that she thought it might now be the time to build confidence to share and passport volunteers amongst organisations. She stressed that the numbers in the report about organisations and individuals were just for East Suffolk. It was noted that, since June, 73 new organisations in East Suffolk had signed up as well as 107 new volunteers who resided in East Suffolk, although she stressed it was not possible to determine the number of those that lived outside East Suffolk who volunteered in East Suffolk.

Members noted that East Suffolk Officers had been very involved in developing the refreshed Volunteering Strategy which had been approved in July 2021 by the Suffolk Health and Wellbeing Board. Officers were now involved in the task and finish groups working on the key priorities around raising the profile of volunteers, supporting people to be more engaged in their communities and take up volunteering, and engaging employers and business leaders around employer supported volunteering to strengthen the relationship between the VCSE and the Business Sector.

Chris suggested that communities would not have got through the pandemic without volunteers, whether they be good neighbourly people, those who were community spirited and involved in the Home But Not Alone Scheme, providing shopping and medications and supporting the vaccination rollout. She explained that there were still calls for volunteers to help support the health and care sector due to difficulties recruiting staff into care roles and volunteers had helped with the urgent booster campaign just before Christmas. Chris suggested that the Scrutiny Committee might want to reflect on and consider the potential overuse of volunteers and the dependency on the goodwill of volunteers in the long run. She added that people would come out and respond in an emergency but she queried at what time/stage did it stop becoming an emergency. She stressed the need to use volunteers in the right way in the longer run.

Maddie Baker-Woods, Chief Operating Officer for Ipswich and East Suffolk CCG, began by thanking the Head of Communities for all the partnership work they had done together throughout this period. She endorsed Chris' comments that voluntary and community organisations and volunteers had played a vital, generous and sustained role in supporting the delivery of services and supporting staff in a true partnership throughout the pandemic. She gave a heartfelt public thank you to all the volunteers, and the people and organisations that had enabled that partnership approach which

had been very far reaching. She referred to the report which gave a number of examples of activities and programmes that had helped people to stay well mentally and physically and she pointed out that most of these had been within local communities. Maddie highlighted another set of partnerships with volunteers through the CCG's main providers eg GP practices through the Patient Participation Groups; in hospital through Red Cross Teams; the Ambulance Service through First Responders and the St Johns Ambulance; through User Groups such as Mental Health Trust volunteers who had called people and stayed in touch with them; through Pharmacies and the national scheme linked in with Home but not Alone. She referred to Chris' comment re sustainability and stressed that throughout the pandemic keeping patients, volunteers and staff safe had been their number one priority. A lot of this has been enabled through CAS through their very important work - being a focal point, registering interest and referring to workforce hubs, and supporting very efficient DBS checks. Maddie shared a case study from Leiston where the community and volunteers had been incredibly generous with their time, eg in wave 1 volunteers had worked with the Leiston practice to support a phlebotomy service which enabled a drive through service to be offered that kept people and staff safe and was a good example of partnership working especially through people from the Sizewell community and the Leiston practice. She added that volunteers had been crucial to the vaccination programme including working in car parks, supporting observation periods, making tea, as well as individuals coming back into nursing and medical roles. She confirmed that there had been similar examples in other communities and she repeated her thanks. Maddie referred to a very important point in the report about legacy and stressed the need to learn from volunteers, how they had felt supported, what had worked well and what could be done even better in the future.

Ben Hogston, Associate Director of Primary Care Networks (Great Yarmouth and Waveney) echoed the previous comments regarding the sustained effort throughout the last year and the sense of community, especially in vaccination centres, with communities getting involved and pulling together, as well as the partnership working. In terms of numbers, it was noted that 470 volunteers had given more than 28,500 hours of support across 50 vaccination sites across Norfolk and Waveney last year. Ben agreed with comments regarding sustainability and the need to discuss how to engage more volunteers and how to plan that together. He gave an example of really good engagement between the Lowestoft Primary Care Network and the Lowestoft Lions and explained that they were discussing how to take that forward. He concluded by thanking everyone involved.

Chris Abraham gave details of the Good Neighbour Scheme which had originally been started by the Rural Community Council and was an initiative mainly for rural parishes around getting volunteers together to support the more vulnerable to continue to live independently in their own homes by doing jobs such as cutting grass, changing light bulbs, getting shopping etc. It was noted that most schemes were very small involving a cohort of around 10-20 volunteers and they operated for less than £1000 a year which paid for insurance, DBS checks and a mobile. Chris stated that it had been a successful programme anyway but Covid had highlighted just how the Good Neighbour Schemes could really support people. She explained that a new Scheme Co-ordinator, Alice Sims, was now in post. She concluded that a few areas in East Suffolk were expressing an interest in the Scheme as several mutual aid groups set up during the pandemic were now looking to offer something more sustainable in the longer term.

Councillor Beavan expressed concern about the delay in using volunteers for the booster programme over the Christmas period, as well as the use of the Sir John Leman School as a vaccination centre, and he queried if more planning and preparedness was needed given it was likely another booster programme would be required. Ben acknowledged that it had been challenging given the short notice period given by the Government and that there had been a number of reasons for using the School which he felt had been successful. This included the need for the surgeries to continue with their normal work and that there had been a good number of volunteers including some from Southwold. He accepted the need to look for improvements and to see how it could be done better next time and it was hoped that guidance on the next booster would arrive in a more timely manner. Councillor Beavan commented that there was a Sports Pavilion on the Common in Southwold that would be a suitable venue and Ben agreed to contact him direct about the next booster rollout.

The Chairman queried if a lot of people were missing out because of digitalisation and Chris responded that there had been rapid digitalisation during the first lockdown because that was the only way charities could keep in contact with clients. She explained that many were now using a hybrid model and wanted to get to a place where nobody was excluded because of their access to digital technology or their ability to use it. She explained that CAS and the Digital Inclusion Network needed to think about how to improve the skills of voluntary and community organisations because not all of them were digitally adept at delivering services online, and members of the public needed to be supported too. She added that East Suffolk had done a lot of work eg the rollout of Grandpads, Digital Mentors and community champions to support people to access things online but moving forwards it was likely a hybrid option of online services and face to face would be needed.

Councillor Gooch queried if students were being encouraged to volunteer to share good practice and foster intergenerational volunteering. Chris stated that the Suffolk Volunteering Strategy included a priority to encourage 14-25 year olds to engage in volunteering. She explained that there was a need to think about innovative ways to encourage people to volunteer eg family volunteering which helped young people to understand the value of volunteering and a 2 year project with East Suffolk with funding from LIFT, which focussed on volunteering as a stepping stone into employment. She stressed the need to raise the profile of volunteering and get into schools and colleges to inspire young people to give their time.

Councillor Beavan referred to the unsuccessful Tribe app and suggested that an app could be really helpful eg 14 volunteers were active and on duty in Southwold which was a real resource that could be used. Chris commented that she was not sure how many referrals were being received but she and Nicole could take this back to the Collaborative Communities Board to discuss whether a volunteering app would be useful.

Councillor Lynch asked what one thing was not done that could have helped East Suffolk as a whole. Maddie stated that she felt the partnership with East Suffolk Council had been incredibly positive, helpful and sustained and she felt that was the reason they were able to work together due to the seeds that had been sown before the pandemic. She acknowledged the importance of reviewing and evaluating

everything including how each and every community across East Suffolk had been supported, in order to use the learning for the forward strategy.

Councillor Byatt asked for an update on the Volunteer Passport Scheme, Voice of a Friend and the Duke of Edinburgh Scheme and he queried what Councillors could do to help. Chris responded that part of the Volunteering Strategy workstream was how to raise the profile of volunteers and she suggested Councillors could share information about and promote the Volunteers Week campaign from 1-7 June each year and Suffolk Action Week which encouraged people to look at volunteering opportunities in their area. In relation to the Volunteer Passport Scheme, Chris explained that a number of volunteers had completed their training eg Safeguarding and H&S and were now ready and on Volunteer Suffolk but she stressed the need for organisations and volunteers to be open to passporting this precious commodity.

The Chairman queried if all volunteers needed to have a DBS check and whether this could be a barrier for some potential volunteers. Chris responded that it was only those that were involved in regulated activity eg those deemed to be working with vulnerable children etc and unsupervised that required a DBS and she felt that, whilst it was a complicated area, it was not really a barrier because even if the check did show an offence it did not always preclude someone from volunteering. She stressed that DBS checks were only as good as the day they were done so managers should always take up references as well.

Councillor Cooper thanked everyone that volunteered in Leiston. Chris acknowledged that there was a really great Good Neighbour Scheme in Leiston. Councillor Lynch referred to Councillor Cooper's comments and asked if there was a way to recognise volunteers to thank them. Chris stated that it was really hard to recognise all the volunteers because there were so many of them. She referred to the "Suffolk Says Thanks" campaign which thanked everyone that helped their communities during the pandemic and whilst she agreed that a lot of people did not want to be thanked publicly, she suggested that everyone that had contributed could receive a written or verbal thank you, especially from the CCGs/PCNs.

The Chairman thanked the guest witnesses for their attendance and participation.

The meeting adjourned at 7.53pm for a comfort break and resumed at 8pm.

The Head of Communities gave a brief update on the Home But Not Alone Scheme which was set up in March 2020 to help residents to access food, medicines and other basic supplies, or who were feeling lonely/isolated. She explained that the current report focussed on what had happened since the last detailed report to this Committee. She added that, between November 2021 and January 2022, 264 referrals had been received with around 2/3rd of those being urgent, and there had been a further five referrals since 22 January 2022. Whilst there were currently low numbers of referrals from HBNA following a spike in January 2022, it was noted that the Communities Team were now receiving reports from other routes including Councillors, partner organisations and even through some Anti-Social Behaviour cases which were being investigated. She emphasised that these referrals were increasingly complex and urgent and the majority related to the cost of living increases and often included aspects around mental health and emotional wellbeing.

The Committee was informed that CAS had surveyed community groups throughout the pandemic but, in June 2021, the Collaborative Communities Board decided to do a further comprehensive survey to see how things had changed as a result of the pandemic in relation to the response groups across Suffolk. 56 East Suffolk groups had responded, 14 were mutual aid groups, 14 charities and 11 were Good Neighbour Schemes. It was noted that 93% were still active or paused and 80% had said they would help out in other emergencies eg fire or flood. 55% of groups said their volunteers might be interested in volunteering elsewhere but 24% said they wanted more volunteers for their own group. 25 groups had said that the most important thing they had learnt was that there were people in need who they had not been previously aware of. Since the survey, CAS had worked with a number of partners, including the Council, to undertake follow up work and details were in Section 2.3 of the report. This included supporting groups to convert to the Good Neighbour Scheme, providing support for mutual aid groups that did not want to become more formalised and also supporting volunteers who were interested in other opportunities.

The Committee's attention was drawn to paragraph 2.4 of the report detailing the wide range of groups the Council was still working with eg CAB, Salvation Army and new projects such as the Teapot Project. Reference was also made to paragraph 2.5 which gave details of how work was ongoing with local different community and voluntary groups to make food more sustainable eg four pantries in Lowestoft were being piloted where people paid a set amount per week to take a certain number of items from the pantry and also access donated food. Details were also given of the Lowestoft Thin Ice project, which provided a free hot meal and drink, and the new Boost Grants Programme to support communities to establish projects to help people get fit and active and access sustainable food.

The Head of Communities explained that the Community Partnership Board had established a Mental Health and Wellbeing Task and Finish Group which would report back to the March Board meeting and the Council had made funding available through a fifth Boost Grant theme to support mental health. In addition, the report gave details of Suffolk level projects eg the Warm Handover Scheme and the Local Welfare Assistance Scheme which included a new initiative run by CAS called PinkOrange that gave four free evening meals a week for four weeks and encouraged cooking as a family and eating healthily.

Councillor Coulam asked if the PinkOrange scheme would help children and families through the school holidays and the Head of Communities responded that there was a separate holiday activities fund programme that was Suffolk wide but from April 2022 the Council would be leading the commissioning of holiday fund activities across East Suffolk for children on free school meals. She added that the range of activities on offer would be broadened based on feedback from the programme last year eg that children had not had breakfast and that they were very tired. She concluded that the aim was to encourage children to try activities that they would not normally do.

Councillor Beavan referred to the fact that the CAB provided budget advice but as they were merging he queried if the Council could help. The Head of Communities reported that interviews were being held shortly for a Financial Inclusion Officer to complement some of the CAB work and it was noted that the post would work with non-Council

tenants as there was already an equivalent post in Housing working with tenants. She stated that it was clear the cost of living crisis was already impacting in that people were having to make choices between heating and eating and some could not afford to run their cars. She explained that a Corporate Management Team Sub-Group wanted to identify where the Council could help and influence eg help people to access money they were entitled to such as benefits and grants and help them to manage their money more effectively. She added that it was becoming clear that there was a group of people who could not read or write who were struggling to read information sent to them. She explained that the Council also wanted to do some preventative work for those people who were likely to tip into crisis point imminently as it was obvious that those who had just about been managing were no longer managing and were seeking help for the first time eg using food banks.

In response to the Chairman's query, the Head of Communities confirmed that anyone with financial difficulties would be signposted to the new Officer. She added that conversations were taking place at a Suffolk level regarding the future of HBNA and Suffolk Advice and Support Services (SASS) but the Council also wanted to act quickly at East Suffolk level because these problems were likely to increase in the next few months. The Chairman asked if both these services would be withdrawn at some point and where people would go after that. The Head of Communities confirmed that HBNA was set up as a direct response to the pandemic and stated that it was likely there would be something in place at Suffolk level but it was not known what that would look like yet. In relation to SASS, the funding had been extended for another six months and again it was not yet known what that would look like after that.

Councillor Lynch referred to problems some people had when applying for free school meals and he queried if there was a way the Council could help guide those people by linking with the schools. The Head of Communities confirmed that it was clear some people did have problems making claims not only for free school meals but also for things like Blue Badge applications and she confirmed that helping people to complete forms was part of the Financial Inclusions Officer's role. The Strategic Director reported that the school received a pupil premium for every student that received free school meals so getting more pupils signed up would make a huge difference. The Chairman queried if the new Financial Inclusion Officer would be inundated over the new few months given the current situation and the Head of Communities acknowledged that this was a potential danger. She added that CAB could still provide support and other funded specialist advice was available through DANES and the Disability Advice Service. It was noted that, as a Council, almost £220K had been put into services that provided advice and support to people but she acknowledged that this post could generate more enquiries.

Councillor Gooch queried how barriers could be broken down for those that needed to ask for help and overcome any sense of shame. The Head of Communities acknowledged this point and stated that Family Intervention Officers had told her that people were reluctant to open up about finances so it often took several meetings to build up enough trust for them to talk about money. She explained that, in the past, the Council had organised a six week campaign in conjunction with the CAB to encourage people to talk about finances and this could potentially be repeated, as well as working with community and voluntary groups to be a buddy and signpost clients to

available support services. She concluded that it was also about making sure that Social Prescribing Link Workers were aware of what was available.

The Chairman asked the Head of Communities to provide a summary on any final points and she referred to the emerging needs section in 3.2 of the report and emphasised the need to try and reach people as early as possible; build on the good partnership working that already existed; and do more to help people to access sustainable sources of food. She also referred to section 3.5 because it was clear there was still a big impact on isolation and loneliness with large numbers of people not yet willing to re-engage in their communities and whose mental and physical health was deteriorating as a result. She referred to the Suffolk Mind Emotional Needs Audit which had shown that, out of the twelve areas, the one recovering least quickly was the one around community which was obviously impacting in many different ways. The Head of Communities asked Members to support and promote Volunteer Suffolk and other national and local volunteering campaigns. She acknowledged there were a number of challenges but stressed there were also many positives eg the strong partnership in the public/private sector and the number of existing projects.

Councillor Coulam asked about nurses going into surgeries who would phone people that were isolated. The Head of Communities responded that she had not heard about this specific role but did know there was a real focus on additional health roles nationally to support GPs and nurses within a practice, such as health coaches and additional mental health resources, although there were challenges locally and nationally recruiting to those posts. She stated that the Council was hoping to work more closely with Primary Care Networks particularly in the north of the district through the new health structures and, as part of the Integrated Care System, there would be a focus on "place" eg Great Yarmouth and Waveney, and also on "localities" below "place" based on Primary Care Network levels. She concluded that Councillor Rudd was very involved in discussions about what those new structures would look like.

Councillor Byatt queried if there was anywhere else in East Suffolk that pantries might be needed and the Head of Communities responded that Halesworth already had a community larder that was similar and a potential site had been identified for a pantry in Saxmundham. She added that there was anticipated demand at other sites across the District including Felixstowe, so Officers were currently exploring a funding pot for other pantry locations.

The Committee received closing remarks from Councillor Smith who stated that it was clear the demand for support was changing and the cost of living rises were hitting residents hard. She concluded that she was pleased about how the partnerships were working together to provide support to East Suffolk residents. Councillor Rudd confirmed that she was in discussions with both CCGs about the two ICS which covered East Suffolk.

Councillor Beavan suggested that the Collaborative Communities Board be recommended to look again at developing an app to communicate with and share volunteers. The Head of Communities agreed to raise this at the Board rather than having it as a formal recommendation through Cabinet.

Councillor Lynch stated that, throughout the pandemic, GDPR rules had been relaxed but this was about to be stopped and information would need to be disposed of. The Head of Communities agreed that the rules were changing and the impact was already being seen eg the Council had been asked to dispose of any information it held about clinically extremely vulnerable people. She stated that the ability to share and pool information with other Suffolk partners had been a real positive to identify and target those who were clinically and financially extremely vulnerable. The Strategic Director confirmed that data was an ongoing issue in terms of sharing information with Government agencies and appropriate departments had been lobbied to encourage them to share data so the Council could do early intervention work, targeting people before they headed into crisis, but this was proving very difficult as they were risk averse despite the initiatives benefitting the person at the other end. He confirmed that the Council were continuing to pursue this.

Councillor Gooch referred to the gaps in the Emergency Plans map and asked if the Council should canvass the parishes to learn what the barriers were. The Chairman stated that the Committee could not make any recommendations to parishes direct but suggested that perhaps Councillors could take this up with their Parish Councils. Councillor Rudd stated that she would discuss the matter with the District Emergency Planning Officer next week. Councillor Lynch stated that Kesgrave had an Emergency Plan but it was not shown on the map.

The Chairman thanked Councillors Rudd and Smith and the Officers for their attendance and participation and, in particular, he thanked the Head of Communities for all her work on this review including the co-ordination of and support for the external witnesses.

RESOLVED

1. That progress in relation to key areas of the Council's response to the Covid-19 pandemic, specifically community response groups, volunteering and emergency planning, as well as the emerging needs be noted.
2. That Ben Hogston liaise with Councillor Beavan regarding a potential venue in Southwold for the next booster rollout.
3. That the Head of Communities raise the possible development of an app with the Collaborative Communities Board.
4. That the Cabinet Member for Communities discuss the promotion of Emergency Plans with the District Emergency Planning Officer.

4 Scrutiny Committee's Forward Work Programme

The Scrutiny Committee reviewed its current forward work programme and it was noted that, unfortunately, Councillor Deacon had not been able to complete the Scoping Form for his topic in time for the Committee to consider it at this meeting. It was agreed, therefore, that Councillor Deacon would bring forward his topic when it

was ready with a view to it being considered in 2022/23 Municipal Year and, in the meantime, the April Committee meeting date would be cancelled.

The Chairman reminded the Committee that they were changing the way in which their Forward Work Programme was drawn up and it was noted that an Away Evening would be held on Monday, 21 February 2022 to formulate the 2022/23 Work Programme.

The meeting concluded at 8.52pm

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Chairman



SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Thursday, 19 May 2022

Subject	The impact of flexible working on the workforce, council resources and productivity
Report by	Councillor Steve Gallant Leader of the Council
Supporting Officers	Stephen Baker, Chief Executive stephen.baker@eastsoffolk.gov.uk Amie Skeet, HR and Workforce Development Manager amie.skeet@eastsoffolk.gov.uk

Is the report Open or Exempt?	OPEN
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Category of Exempt Information and reason why it is NOT in the public interest to disclose the exempt information.	Not applicable
Wards Affected:	All Wards

Purpose and high-level overview

Purpose of Report:

The purpose of this report is to examine the impact of the move away from traditional office based working arrangements to a more flexible, hybrid approach and that, in doing so, the Council is meeting its statutory obligations, maintaining service delivery and having due regard for the health and wellbeing of its workforce.

Options:

There is an option to return to pre pandemic office based working arrangements, subject to the advice of the Council's Health and Safety Team, but the World Health Organization has yet to downgrade the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak and infection rates remain fairly high in the local area. For the period 23 to 29 April 2022, there were 428 positive test results recorded in the district. In terms of the Council's workforce, 34 employees tested positive in April and 0.8% of the workforce did not feel well enough to work as a result of contracting the virus. In view of this, whilst in some ways we must learn to live and adapt to a world where COVID-19 is endemic, the Council must ensure that it takes all appropriate steps to protect its workforce and reduce the levels of transmission wherever possible. In addition, the significant interest in more flexible forms of working have created new employee expectations and research suggests that organisations that do not support flexible forms of working may be at risk of increased employee turnover, reduced employee engagement and limitations on the ability to attract talent in the future.

Recommendation:

That the Scrutiny Committee, having considered the report, makes any recommendations as required.

Corporate Impact Assessment

Governance:

The Scrutiny Committee has a role to scrutinise and review actions taken by the Council and has requested a review of the impact of hybrid working on the Council, its workforce, service delivery and the use of Council owned buildings. The Committee is also seeking reassurance that the Council is meeting its statutory and contractual obligations.

ESC policies and strategies that directly apply to the proposal:

People Strategy, Workforce Development Plan, Guide to Agile Working, Digital Strategy, ICT Security Policy, ICT Acceptable Use Policy, Data Protection Policy, Health and Safety Policy and Flexible Working Guidance and Options

Environmental:

The move to hybrid working has had a positive effect on the Council's carbon emissions which contributes to the Council's stated aim to become a carbon neutral council by 2030. It also has a positive effect on the personal carbon footprint of our workforce - when going into lockdown at the height of the pandemic, working from home reduced

emissions caused by the commute to work by 66% (offset against any additional emissions from people's homes as a result of heating etc).

Equalities and Diversity:

Flexible working has been approached on a team by team basis to ensure that the needs of the customer and the service are being met. Whilst the hybrid approach may be suitable for many service areas, it is recognised that it is not appropriate for all service areas and in some cases, a return to pre pandemic ways of working has been the most appropriate way forward. However, our response to the national lockdown has accelerated the process of change in some areas and services have been adapted to meet the changing needs of customers, including implementation of a Digital Reception.

Financial:

The new flexible approach to work is generating quantifiable savings in several areas including mileage claims. However, savings have also been made in terms of efficiencies with the opportunity taken to review and refine processes. Hybrid working is one way in which we can answer the Government's call for local authorities to be lean and efficient.

Human Resources:

The Council's Human Resources team has been on a sharp learning curve over the course of the last two years in terms of rolling out appropriate training, guidance and support for managers and the workforce generally with remote, flexible working and the importance of promoting good mental health and wellbeing.

ICT:

Technology plays a critical role in hybrid working and employees need to be able to work seamlessly between the workplace and home. This is intrinsic to the ICT Team's transformation work, both from a support and planned work perspective. The Team ensures that systems are available remotely, that the performance of the network is reliable and secure and that new technology is delivered. As a result of the pandemic, we have all had to grasp new technology and it is recognised that levels of confidence vary and that training is key. The Council was generally well set up pre pandemic (in terms of its ICT provision) and was able to adapt quickly to homeworking. This was through forethought and design and not by chance. The scenario placed on us by the pandemic has enabled changes in mindset to take place in months that would historically have taken years to achieve, and we have been able to realise the benefits of working in an agile way.

Legal:

No specific implications arising.

Risk:

Risks were managed throughout the pandemic and will continue to be managed through the corporate Risk Register and the Corporate Governance Group. In addition, the Chief Executive is also the Head of Paid Service which is a statutory role required by Section 4 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989. The Head of Paid Service is responsible for ensuring that the Council's functions are properly co-ordinated as well as overseeing the workforce and ensuring appropriate staffing arrangements are in place. The Council's HR and Workforce Development Manager reports direct to the Chief Executive and together they ensure that the Council has appropriate arrangements in place and is meeting its obligations.

External Consultees:	None
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Strategic Plan Priorities

Select the priorities of the Strategic Plan which are supported by this proposal: <i>(Select only one primary and as many secondary as appropriate)</i>		Primary priority	Secondary priorities
T01	Growing our Economy		
P01	Build the right environment for East Suffolk	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P02	Attract and stimulate inward investment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P03	Maximise and grow the unique selling points of East Suffolk	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P04	Business partnerships	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P05	Support and deliver infrastructure	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
T02	Enabling our Communities		
P06	Community Partnerships	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P07	Taking positive action on what matters most	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P08	Maximising health, well-being and safety in our District	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P09	Community Pride	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
T03	Maintaining Financial Sustainability		
P10	Organisational design and streamlining services	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
P11	Making best use of and investing in our assets	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
P12	Being commercially astute	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
P13	Optimising our financial investments and grant opportunities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P14	Review service delivery with partners	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
T04	Delivering Digital Transformation		
P15	Digital by default	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
P16	Lean and efficient streamlined services	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
P17	Effective use of data	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P18	Skills and training	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
P19	District-wide digital infrastructure	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
T05	Caring for our Environment		
P20	Lead by example	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
P21	Minimise waste, reuse materials, increase recycling	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P22	Renewable energy	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P23	Protection, education and influence	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
XXX	Governance		
XXX	How ESC governs itself as an authority	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
How does this proposal support the priorities selected?			
<p>The Council needs to remain agile to changing demands to ensure it is fit for purpose and continues to deliver excellent services. The constant process of service review and redesign ensures that we continue to meet the needs of our customers and delivers against several Strategic Plan priorities in terms of organisational design, financial savings, digital transformation and caring for our environment.</p>			

Background and Justification for Recommendation

1	Background facts
1.1	<p>In March 2020 the Government imposed a national lockdown and instructed people to work from home wherever possible. As a result, the Council responded immediately to this direction and arrangements were put in place to support the workforce working from home. The Council has continued to respond appropriately to the Government’s roadmap out of lockdown and continues to heed the advice of Suffolk Public Health and its own Health and Safety Team to help protect the workforce from the virus.</p>
1.2	<p>There is a wide range of research available indicating that the majority of workers want to continue to work from home at least some of the time, presenting new opportunities for organisations to establish new ways of working. According to data from the Office of National Statistics, prior to COVID-19 only around 5% of the workforce worked mainly from home and research carried out by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development showed that 65% of employers did not offer regular homeworking. This figure is expected to fall dramatically to 37%.</p>
1.3	<p>In May/June 2020 the Council carried out an IT Homeworking survey of its workforce (including Members) which generated 495 responses. The purpose of the survey was to create a picture of how the organisation was functioning so that the ICT Team could adapt its approach accordingly. Overall satisfaction levels were high with just 19 people stating that they were dissatisfied with the IT homeworking provision. These 19 people were contacted to follow up their concerns and solutions were put in place where possible. However, some of these issues were beyond the Council’s control including local internet connection capacity and speed.</p>
1.4	<p>Although it was clear from the results of the above survey that the majority of the workforce had been able to adapt reasonably well, it was also recognised that homeworking was not straightforward for some for a variety of reasons. In addition, it was recognised that situations and opinions would change as we moved through 2020 and the impact of the pandemic endured. In response, during September 2020, managers were asked to have individual conversations with their team members to review their current work pattern and establish what their preferred workstyle would be moving forward and whether this fitted with the needs of the service. These meetings were designed to give staff a degree of stability at a time when we were going through a period of considerable unease. These meetings included an HR representative and were captured on prescribed forms to ensure consistency of approach.</p>
1.5	<p>In May 2021 the Council carried out further consultation with its workforce in terms of future accommodation requirements. 565 people responded (74% of the workforce). The results showed that 76.11% of the workforce had been able to carry out all elements of their role at home although obviously some roles are less suited to homeworking. However, the overwhelming response (92%) was that employees would prefer a balance where they are in the office for some of the week and working from home for the remainder. This has led to the use of relatively new terms: hybrid working/agile working.</p>
1.6	<p>The significant interest in more flexible forms of working, and hybrid working in particular, has created new employee expectations and desires. Organisations</p>

	<p>who do not support flexible forms of working are very likely to experience increased employee turnover, reduced employee engagement and limitations on the ability to attract talent in the future. This is at a time when the Council is experiencing recruitment challenges in a number of areas.</p>
1.7	<p>In order to ensure the successful implementation of hybrid working, a number of steps are necessary including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The importance of agreeing an overall strategic position on hybrid working and developing a policy and supporting guidance reflecting this. This has been done through the Accommodation Working Group (further details below) who are looking at future accommodation needs and a Guide to Agile Working that has been approved by the Corporate Management Team following consultation with Unison (Appendix A). • Defining hybrid working within the context of the Council as an organisation. • Providing managers with the necessary tools and training. • Providing an opportunity to ask questions and raise concerns. • A communication plan to share plans for future hybrid working. • Planning for and responding to the organisational implications of hybrid working on matters such as technology, employee wellbeing, inclusion and facilities. • Supporting effective team building and cohesion in hybrid teams.
1.8	<p>The success of hybrid working is based on effective communication. When communication is not well managed it can result in poor information flow, knowledge gaps, barriers to effective team working and exclusion of team members. Communication within hybrid teams needs to be more intentional as casual or ad-hoc conversations may be reduced. Effective communication needs to be seen as the responsibility of everyone in the team and how a hybrid team needs to communicate will vary depending on its size and the nature of the roles within the team. With this in mind, a template to capture team protocol for agile working has been devised to help managers capture and agree their approach. A copy of this template is included at Appendix B. This has been rolled out as part of ongoing workshops for managers and the feedback has been positive. However, the value of regular social and human connection to support employee engagement and team building should not be lost.</p>
1.9	<p>Hybrid working has made new demands of managers and whilst the majority have developed new skills in terms of managing a remote workforce, hybrid working brings unique challenges that are different from predominantly office-based working. In response the Council has put in place learning and development to ensure effective people management including support with managing individuals and teams remotely, developing effective communication skills, performance management, team and relationship building. Support has also been provided in terms of an enhanced induction process for new starters and employee engagement.</p>
1.10	<p>Technology plays a critical role in hybrid working and employees need to be able to work seamlessly between the workplace and home and there needs to be ease of connectivity between people in the office and those working remotely. It is recognised that the effective use of technology can help to support health and wellbeing. It was acknowledged early on that user education was key and in response a series of highlights were posted on the intranet to help users understand how laptops and VPN connections work and the impact of internet and upload speed and latency. The IT Homeworking survey results have been used to</p>

help the ICT Team manage and shape its service and to look for opportunities to improve speed/access to business systems where possible.

Microsoft Teams was implemented and rolled out in 2020 during the pandemic to facilitate better team working and remote working capability, with briefing sessions scheduled and offered to all staff and Members to ensure a successful rollout and understanding of how to use the Teams environment. Zoom was also implemented, but predominantly used for public facing meetings.

The rollout of MS Teams has brought another level of remote working and collaboration to the organisation with teams keeping in touch and collaborating using this technology all day every day, both informally and formally. By way of example, please see below the statistics for the 2021/22 financial year:

Number of internal calls using MS Teams	124,361
Number of internal channel messages using MS Teams	37,136
Number of internal chat messages sent using MS Teams	1,580,943
Number of meeting participants using MS Teams	46,642
For context:	
Number of emails sent by the organisation	1,787,302

A number of Surface Hubs have been ordered for trial purposes which should allow for more inclusive conversations when some participants are in the room together with others joining remotely. When co-located employees have a face to face meeting, those joining remotely can experience ‘presence disparity’, where people experience the meeting differently and communication can be disrupted. Surface Hubs are large touch screens which inclusively engage everyone’s voices, faces, and ideas. However, delivery has been delayed due to global supply chain issues.

- 1.11 The employee wellbeing implications of COVID-19 will require focus for some time. This may include supporting employees experiencing poor mental health, addressing specific concerns and anxieties about the return to the workplace and the impact of Long COVID. In the longer term, hybrid working may support improved wellbeing through reducing commuting time, providing employees with more autonomy around their schedules and extra time for health and wellbeing activities. Hybrid working may however bring with it specific challenges around work-life balance and managing the boundaries between work and home. The Council has been acutely aware of the impact of not only the pandemic but remote working on its workforce and put in place a number of measures to address this:
- Providing training and support to employees on managing work-life balance whilst working in a hybrid way / working from home.
 - Offering training on digital wellbeing and having healthy habits in relation to the use of technology, including helping employees to mindfully disconnect.
 - Helping managers to understand the potential wellbeing implications of hybrid working and equipping them to have appropriate wellbeing conversations.
 - Ongoing mental health support and information for all employees including access to Care First, Able Futures and our own, internal, Mental Health First Aiders.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘My Possible Self’ mental health app that offers advice and tools to improve wellbeing. • Ensuring managers are aware of potential signs and symptoms of poor wellbeing or mental health. • Encouraging and reinforcing the positive benefits of exercise and healthy living.
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2 Current position

2.1	<p><u>Employment Contracts</u></p> <p>There have been no changes made to employment contracts in terms of work base. However, the Guide to Agile Working recognises that the workforce does not need to be located in set buildings to provide effective services and that in many areas, staff will be able to choose when, where and how they work as long as it suits the needs of the service they are providing. The Guide is very clear that staff must accept that it is a reasonable request for a manager to require them to work in the office for performance, operational and/or team needs. This is regularly emphasised to staff and managers and covered in workshops that have been delivered by HR.</p>
2.2	<p><u>Health and Safety</u></p> <p>Health and safety is a shared responsibility between the employer and employee and if there is any doubt, the Council’s Health and Safety Team is available to advise. Employees have a responsibility for their own health and safety and the health and safety of others while they are carrying out work activities (regardless of the work location) in accordance with the Council’s Health and Safety Policy. The same duties under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 continue to apply at home as they do in the office. Employees must be able to carry out their work in a safe manner and equipment and information must be safely and securely stored according to the Council’s policies and procedures. When working from home the employee has a responsibility to ensure they have an appropriate workspace with adequate security, storage and screening from activities and noise in the rest of the home. There must also be adequate ventilation and lighting. Employees must not carry out work meetings in their home with customers or officers from other agencies. If homeworkers need to attend site meetings direct from home, they must follow the Council’s Lone Working Policy.</p> <p><u>Risk Assessments</u></p> <p>The Council has a generic risk assessment template that covers working from home that managers can adopt or amend as appropriate. Managers should ensure that any of their team who routinely work from home can implement the controls in the Team’s risk assessment. Managers should seek advice from the Health and Safety Team for any risks for which they cannot determine an appropriate control. Employees must confirm that they will notify the Council if any changes occur following the assessment. All reasonable steps to ensure that working conditions continue to comply with Health and Safety requirements must be undertaken.</p> <p>All accidents and injuries which occur in the course of the employee’s homeworking should be reported in the usual way.</p> <p><u>Managing Work Related Stress/Mental Health</u></p>

	<p>Managers need to actively manage work related stress/mental health and protect workers from stress by undertaking a risk assessment and acting on it. In addition, there are a number of practical things that can be done to help manage the risks of stress and mental health problems for homeworkers including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Talking openly with team members about the possibility of them becoming stressed or mentally unwell. • Involve them in completing stress risk assessments so they can help identify potential problems and solutions. • Keep them updated on what is happening so they feel involved and reassured. • Have regular keep-in-touch meetings or calls so they can share any concerns. • Make homeworkers aware of any occupational support available to them • Take account the needs of the individual. • Review how work is carried out to reduce any potential causes of stress. <p><u>Display Screen Equipment (DSE)</u></p> <p>The Council has not issued any contracts of employment which specifically state the employee’s place of work as ‘home’. In view of this, there is no legal requirement for the Council to carry out physical inspections of people’s homes or their DSE set-up. Our current policy of requiring self-assessment meets the requirements of current health and safety legislation so long as managers seek assistance from the Health and Safety Team or HR if they cannot resolve any issues that the employee identifies. If the employee cannot use a workstation that complies with DSE Regulations, that member of staff may need to work from the office. In 2021/22, 439 DSE assessments were submitted from those working from home and 153 from those working in the office. 14% of the working from home assessments required action compared to 13% for those working in the office. 90% of all actions have been resolved but the remainder have been left open to allow managers to monitor the success of the action taken.</p> <p>As part of the DSE process, staff are reminded of the need to take regular breaks. In addition, managers have a responsibility to ensure that staff are taking adequate breaks and are not working excessive hours. However, the employee is also responsible for managing their work in an appropriate and safe manner. East Suffolk Lifestyle is a benefits scheme open to all employees and includes discounts on gym membership and a cycling to work scheme. In addition, in partnership with Care First (a free employees assistance service) the workforce has access to a range of webinars and initiatives including Walk to Work Day, Move More Month, Wellbeing Walking Competition etc.</p> <p>The Council is currently considering a process for PAT testing electrical equipment being used at home. This should be done every 5 years and so there is time for this process to be agreed and implemented. In addition, the Health and Safety Team is currently putting together a checklist for people who work from home to use.</p>
2.3	<p><u>Impact on productivity</u></p> <p>There are widespread studies available that demonstrate that working from home increases productivity and promotes wellbeing, innovation and inclusion.</p>

Anecdotal evidence based on feedback received from staff and managers and collected during workshops and meetings suggest that productivity in many teams has increased due mainly to less travelling between sites and commuting. Other contributory factors include quieter working conditions at home and less interruptions. However, quantitative information is available in the form of the Council's performance reports which confirm that productivity has increased over the last two years. By way of example:

- For 2019/20 the year end performance result for determining minor planning applications within 8 weeks was 75.3%. For 2020/21 it was 80%.
- For 2019/20 the year end performance result for determining new Housing Benefit claims was 11.36 days. For 2020/21 it was 8 days.
- For 2019/20 the year end performance result for abandoned calls to our Customer Services number was 26%. For 2020/21 it was 2.73%.

Whilst overall performance for 2021/22 is currently being analysed, it is important to note that the process for reviewing and managing service plans and related performance has been more robustly monitored over the last two years and this will continue to be the case.

The Council has not experienced an increase in the number of poor performance/capability cases since 2020 and there have been no disciplinary proceedings relating to problems associated with homeworking. In addition, we can report that the Anglia Revenues Partnership (a results driven service) has found that productivity has improved since most of their staff have been working from home and business delivery (operating a mainly transactional and telephony service), has not been impacted. In addition, employee engagement has not suffered (gauged through staff surveys) and the ARP recently secured Thriving Places accreditation.

Members will be aware that the Council underwent a Corporate Peer Challenge in February 2022 which focussed on five core areas:

1. Local Priorities and Outcomes
2. Organisational and Place Leadership
3. Governance and Culture
4. Financial Planning and Management
5. Capacity for Improvement

The report (still in draft form) was extremely complimentary about the Council's overall performance, approach and culture including the following specific references:

"The systems are in place to track performance with the framework built around the Strategic Plan, providing KPI's that inform the Council if outcomes are being met."

"Senior managers demonstrate a high degree of passion for their work areas and are dedicated to ensuring the Strategic Plan outcomes are delivered to communities. Peers could see and feel the organisation's values in the way staff behaved and spoke about

	<p><i>their work, teams and culture. There is a strong sense of ‘one council’ which galvanises the organisation and energises the workforce to do whatever it takes to deliver on the plans.”</i></p> <p><i>“There is a strong ‘one team’ ethos that runs through the organisation across both Members and staff and there is a clear sense of pride in all they do. Everyone wants to deliver the best outcomes for their communities. The commitment is an impressive component to organisational culture and a sound foundation for building upon.”</i></p> <p>Although the evidence confirms that a drop in productivity is not an issue at the current time, the Council recognises that only robust and consistent performance management will ensure that it remains the case. Trust is a key success factor; when employees are working remotely or more flexibly, their performance may be harder to observe. It is also recognised that the inaccessibility of colleagues can be an issue for those very quick questions needed to move something forward. However, staff consultation shows that in many cases it is now easier to get instant answers to questions through the use of, for example, MS Teams and the pace of work being undertaken (coupled with immediacy of responses) has become quicker than before.</p>
2.4	<p><u>Impact on staff development/new starters</u></p> <p>Outside of the periods of national lockdown, our offices have remained open to staff to access and work from as necessary, albeit in a more restricted capacity in terms of the availability of desks. This has allowed us to meet new staff and induct them into teams and managers have worked hard to ensure that new starters have more contact than usual with their managers and with their colleagues. Even during the periods of greatest restriction, some people worked from the office because they could not do their job from home or had other needs. This was permitted under the legislation in place at the time and was monitored to ensure compliance.</p> <p>The corporate induction process asks new starters to describe their first impression of the Council and this feedback has always (and continues to be) positive. In terms of development, we have worked hard with our training providers to switch to virtual training where possible and now deliver a significant amount of training that way.</p> <p>We do appreciate that there is an element of “osmosis learning” being lost – the learning we soak up as we go about our jobs in an office environment. However, it does mean we have to think more creatively about how new starters gain the knowledge they require and that, in turn, ensure it becomes more structured and effective.</p> <p>It remains the case that advice to managers is that new starters will benefit from working in the office to receive training and to build relationships with the team and more broadly.</p>
2.5	<p><u>What are the key benefits of hybrid working?</u></p> <p>Despite the many complexities and challenges of living and working through the global pandemic, employees have identified many benefits from working from home for both them and the Council. These benefits include a better work–life balance, greater ability to focus with fewer distractions, more time for family and</p>

friends, saved commuting time and costs, IT upskilling and higher levels of motivation.

Other benefits of flexible working include savings on office space, higher levels of employee job satisfaction and reduced absence rates.

In line with the Flexible Working Regulations 2014 and the Children and Families Act 2014, employees have a statutory right to request flexible working and managers are encouraged to consider requests sympathetically, although service needs are the priority. The Council recognises the benefits to be gained by encouraging flexible working practices and we support our employees to find practical solutions to balance/combine their working life with other responsibilities. Flexible working is recognised as a business imperative for attracting and retaining staff. However, flexible working arrangements are not an entitlement and are not suitable for all jobs, all individuals and all teams. Different types of work and workplaces present different challenges and the ways of giving flexibility are likely to vary. The Council has produced Flexible Working Guidance and Options which seeks to shift the organisation's emphasis from presence at work to performance. The intended focus is on what and how things get done in the most efficient way, rather than where and when. This requires a culture shift where people are trusted to work with less monitoring and supervision with a focus on delivery of agreed outcomes. A range of flexible working options are available as following:

- Flexi time
- 9-Day fortnights
- Term-time working
- Annualised hours
- Job sharing
- Part time working
- Negotiated hours
- Compressed hours
- Regular homeworking
- Occasional homeworking

In the May 2021 staff accommodation survey referenced above, staff were asked to state the benefits of working flexibly and the survey captured the following responses:

- Greater flexibility in working hours and better work-life balance.
- Improved employee wellbeing, reduced stress and better sense of control.
- Greater job satisfaction, motivation and productivity.
- An opportunity to manage the working day more efficiently with increased engagement because of autonomy and trust.
- Working in a comfortable environment with the ability to concentrate and focus.
- Saving on commuting time and cost.
- Reduction in carbon footprint.
- Positive impact on mental health/improved health and wellbeing for some.
- Being able to protect vulnerable relatives and the young from COVID.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff are thankful for the opportunity to work from home. • The ability to be at home with family members when childcare and/or respite facilities are closed.
2.6	<p><u>What are the potential negatives of hybrid working?</u></p> <p>It was apparent from the responses to the survey that some people experience difficulties working from home. The main disadvantages identified were as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of social interaction with colleagues. • Missing ad hoc conversations. • Access to equipment (such as printers). • Feeling less engaged with the organisation as a whole. • Heating costs.. • Opportunity to offload with colleagues if staff have difficult conversations or interactions with rude and challenging customers. • Negative impact on mental health. • Unreliable/poor broadband. • Lack of appropriate space to work. • Family members may be unaware of boundaries and cause interruptions during the working day (although staff often have flexibility around working hours and frequency of breaks to counter this). • No switch off from home life/loss of work life balance - workshops have been provided to staff on working from home including strategies for planning the day, sticking to working hours etc. • Greater amount of pressure/emotional stress – regular announcements on Sharepoint on various health and wellbeing initiatives being run, coffee morning virtual sessions, counselling, mental health first aiders, increased contact from managers, team meetings etc. <p>It should be noted that the above responses scored much lower than the positive responses cited in paragraph 2.5 above, but it should not be underestimated the impact that any one of the above may have on an individual.</p> <p>It is also recognised that we are currently living through a cost of living crisis and that escalating utility costs will have an impact where staff choose to work from home, particularly during the winter. Whilst there are no plans to contribute towards these additional costs, in most cases the savings being made on the commute to work will offset these. The offices are open for use by any officer who feels they would rather work from there, as they did prior to the pandemic, in order to help mitigate additional utility costs.</p> <p>It should be noted that capacity at East Suffolk House may be an issue given that the Annex is currently being used by Port Health staff for which Port Health is paying a market rent.</p>
2.7	<p><u>ICT Security and Data Protection</u></p> <p>The Council provides employees with access to the personal and confidential information they need to do their job. This information must not be disclosed to others who are not authorised to see it and the security of council information and equipment is of utmost importance.</p>

	<p>When working from home or in any mobile way, members of staff who hold or collect personal data are responsible for their own compliance with data protection law and must ensure that personal and/or sensitive information is kept and processed in accordance with UK General Data Protection Regulation, the Data Protection Act 2018 and the Council’s Data Protection Policy. Working from home may result in information being held outside the office environment for a longer period and the security of documents is of high importance. The key thing to remember when working at home, or anywhere away from the office, is that the same data protection and security principles apply as they would in an office environment. In the main, teams are working electronically and do not have ‘paper’ documents laying around in their homes, so ‘document security’ needs to be taken in context - the security of IT systems is of utmost importance in terms of data protection.</p> <p>The Council has a number of policies in place to govern the use of information including the ICT Security Policy, ICT Acceptable Use Policy and the Data Protection Policy. The IT network is robustly managed with scheduled patches applied to systems, security updates and regular penetration testing, along with the relevant web filtering, phishing prevention, two-factor authentication and other security measures in place such as ensuring we comply to PCIDSS regulations in terms of taking payments, for example.</p>
2.8	<p><u>What is the impact on Council building space/capacity?</u></p> <p>A number of key principles have been developed which capture the Council’s approach to future working styles:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We want to capitalise on our new agile working culture to provide an environment where staff and members can thrive. Instead of regimented office-working, we want to allow our people to be as flexible as possible, while still connecting easily with colleagues and utilising office space as and when required. • We will re-design our physical workplace to help drive the organisation forward with a shared sense of purpose and a culture of collaboration. Our future office space will not support full working weeks for everyone but will feature a range of differing environments to inspire creative thinking, provide quiet working areas and unite the organisation for meetings. • Naturally, we want the organisation to operate efficiently and to make the most appropriate use of our resources. We will therefore ensure that sensible and progressive decisions are made about the future of our workplaces which match our progressive ambitions, but which will also help us achieve financial sustainability. <p>An Accommodation Working Group has been in place for some time now and works to the above key principles. Meetings have been held with all Heads of Service to discuss the future requirements of their teams and options are currently being pulled together regarding the potential use of the offices going forward which includes reconfiguration. However, at the current time, there are no plans to reduce the Council’s estate.</p>

	<p>The number of desks available for use in our buildings is based on the advice of the Council’s Health and Safety Team and on the data released by Suffolk Public Health. Fewer desks are available than were before the pandemic and these must be booked in advance of working in the offices. Desk usage is regularly monitored and at no point have capacity levels been reached. All desks are hot desks (unless the work requires specialist equipment) and teams are encouraged to book meeting rooms for face to face meetings and to collaborate on projects.</p> <p>The staff accommodation survey carried out in May 2021 asked staff about how they would like to see the offices reconfigured for future use which returned a range of options including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relaxed break out space for collaborative working • Traditional hot desks set in quiet areas • More meeting rooms • Work pods • Quiet spaces • Creative spaces • Desks with shared monitors for collaborative working <p>Staff were also asked for their views in relation to the likely use of touchdown points outside of the offices which also generated a range of responses including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Any communal office space • Libraries • Anywhere midway between the two headquarters
2.9	<p><u>What are the environmental benefits of homeworking?</u></p> <p>A key principle underpinning the Council’s approach to hybrid working is that our new working culture will be designed with the environment at its heart which reflects one of the key themes within the Strategic Plan. The blending of virtual and physical workspaces should help reduce the Council’s carbon footprint which includes reductions in emissions from travel and reducing waste, particularly from plastic and paper. There was a 66.6% reduction in tCO2e emissions when offset against any additional emissions from people’s homes as a result of heating etc in 2020/21 compared to 2019/20.</p>
2.10	<p><u>What are the financial and asset benefits of agile working?</u></p> <p>Annual travel costs going forward are currently forecast to be £450k per annum compared to £700k as at March 2020. Cost savings in relation to printing and stationery are forecast to be £30k per annum.</p> <p>Increased homeworking has allowed the Annex at East Suffolk House to be used to accommodate Port Health staff who would otherwise have required additional space at additional cost. Port Health pay the Council market rent for use of this space at the rate of £130k per annum. It has also allowed the Rotterdam Road office in Lowestoft (used by around 50+ office-based housing staff) to be closed down with the ‘stores’ element remaining as the only functional part of that building complex thereby allowing for a review of future building needs. Prior to the pandemic, this was going to be a large new build office project but has allowed us to re-think requirements.</p>

3 How to address current situation

3.1	The evidence collected over the last two years is overwhelmingly in support of the move to a more hybrid approach to working. The Council continues to be a highly functioning organisation and the needs of the workforce are being met. The Council is taking a well-considered approach in terms of health and safety and wellbeing and productivity/performance is being managed effectively.
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4 Reason/s for recommendation

4.1	This report is intended to provide an overview of the Council's approach to hybrid working and seeks to reassure Members that all necessary steps are being taken to support staff, ensure that the Council is meeting its statutory obligations and that the Council continues to deliver effective services to all its communities to the same high standards it always has.
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Appendices

Appendices:

Appendix A	Guide to Agile Working
Appendix B	Team Protocol for Agile Working

Background reference papers:

None.



Guide to Agile Working

1. Introduction

East Suffolk Council (ESC) recognises that the workforce does not need to be in set buildings to effectively provide services. Agile working can support the development of modern working practices enabling our people to maximise their performance and productivity, whilst maintaining a good work life balance. In addition, technology makes it easy to access information remotely, work from a variety of locations, whilst promoting a more joined up service. However, it is important to note that quality of service delivery must not be compromised by working in an agile way.

In many areas of the Council our people, staff and members, will be able to choose when, where and how they work in the future as long as it suits the purpose of their job role and once it is safe to do so. This will give us the fantastic opportunity to embrace the benefits from home working during COVID-19 of being able to spend more time at home, while enabling our people to be flexible in the way they work and reconnect with their colleagues and the office as needed. The Council is able to respond to what our People have told us in our comprehensive staff survey about their working preferences as we move out of the pandemic.

The key principles that underpin this guide are:

1. **We want to capitalise on our new agile working culture to provide an environment where staff and members can thrive.** Instead of regimented office-working, we want to allow our people to be as flexible as possible, while still connecting easily with colleagues and utilising office space as and when required.
2. **We want to make smarter use of hybrid workspaces which merge the physical and virtual office.** Therefore, we will invest further in digital innovation and automation to help further develop - and provide the necessary support and tools for - our flexible workforce.
3. **We will re-design our physical workplace to help drive the organisation forward with a shared sense of purpose and a culture of collaboration.** Our future office space will not support full working weeks for everyone but will feature a range of differing environments to inspire creative thinking, provide quiet working areas and unite the organisation for meetings.
4. **Our new working culture will be designed with the environment at heart. The blending of virtual and physical workspaces should help reduce ESC's carbon footprint.** This includes reductions in emissions from travel and reducing waste - particularly from plastic and paper.

5. **Naturally, we want the organisation to operate efficiently and to make the most appropriate use of our resources.** We will therefore ensure that sensible and progressive decisions are made about the future of our workplaces which match our progressive ambitions, but which will also help us achieve financial sustainability.

2. Scope

This Guide applies to all employees and members at East Suffolk Council. Although relevant to employees working at all levels within the organisation, the nature and extent of Agile Working will depend upon the job undertaken. It is important to note that there are some roles that can't be undertaken at home. Other considerations will include the impact on the ability to meet customer demand (internal and external), employee welfare and UK GDPR implications of carrying out certain roles in a home / community context. The Guide also applies to Members.

The different ways in which Agile working can be undertaken is dependent on the demands and needs of the role and service the individual's preferences and circumstances. This must always ensure that the needs of the service user are the key priority.

3. What is agile working?

Agile working underpins the principle that work is an activity we do rather than a place we go. It places an emphasis on how we make use of the technology and workspace available to complete our work. The Agile Working Guide sits alongside the Council's Flexible Working Policy [Flexible Working Guidance and Options.docx \(sharepoint.com\)](#).

By working in an agile way we will develop a more modern, dynamic workforce that delivers our services from locations other than the traditional working environment of a desk in a council building. Agile working enables employees to work flexibly from any location, whether it is from a Council building, within the community at a touch down location or by varying degrees of home working and regular working from the office.

Introducing more agile working practices will involve developing a new work culture with new approaches to management and teamwork looking at outcomes as the measure of success.

4. Benefits and disbenefits

This approach to agile working supports what our people have said in the recent survey that they are looking for in future working environments:

- Saving on commuting time and cost and reduction in our carbon footprint;

- Greater flexibility in working hours and better work life balance, with improved employee wellbeing, health and happiness – reduced stress, better sense of control, greater job satisfaction, motivation, morale and productivity;
- An opportunity for our people to manage their working day more efficiently with increased engagement as a result of autonomy and trust at work;
- Offering a range of work styles to match individual work preferences will enable people to work where they can be comfortable, able to concentrate and focus and therefore be more effective;
- Ensuring the office provides social interaction and collaborative space.

Some people also experience difficulties working from home and this should be acknowledged and addressed through the work style agreed. The main disadvantages identified through the survey are the lack of social interaction with colleagues, missing out on ad hoc conversations, access to printers and feeling less engaged with the organisation as a whole when people have been solely working from home.

Our people have said that they appreciate wearing more comfortable clothing when they work from home. It is fine that you take a more casual approach when you work in the office in the future although please take into account how you represent the Council if you meet customers as part of your role. If unsure, speak to your manager.

5. Responsibilities

Corporate responsibilities

CMT are responsible for establishing arrangements to ensure:

- Effective implementation of this guide;
- Continued service delivery;
- Consultation with their employees on these arrangements;

Management Responsibilities

- Being flexible, open and constructive whilst remaining focused on the needs of the service.
- Ensuring regular communication is maintained between themselves and team members, providing support.
- Being flexible in requiring the employee to attend the office at short notice.
- Setting and monitoring defined performance measures in line with the Council's Performance Management arrangements - see [Performance Improvement Policy - June 2021.docx \(sharepoint.com\)](#).
- Allowing employees who are working from home to have a right to privacy out of working hours and the ability to separate their working and home lives.

- Meeting their duties in relation to health and safety by undertaking appropriate risk assessments and acting on any areas of concern for their employees.
- Jointly agreeing with the employee their Agile working style and how this will be achieved.

Employee Responsibilities

- Complying with this Guide in a reasonable, constructive and appropriate manner.
- Jointly agreeing an agile working style with their manager and maintaining regular contact with their manager.
- Being flexible, open and constructive in discussing and agreeing agile working arrangements, whilst remaining focused on the needs of service.
- Complying with Health and Safety policy and procedures by participating in and undertaking risk assessments; carrying out any necessary actions to minimise risk; maintaining a safe working environment and taking reasonable care of their own safety.
- Complying with confidentiality, data protection and internet security policies.
- Ensure that all reasonable care is taken of all Council supplied ICT equipment
- Reporting immediately once known, any loss, theft or damage to Council IT equipment or the loss of confidential information.
- Consulting with any necessary parties, such as insurance companies, regarding home working.

Staff must accept it is a reasonable request for a manager to require them to work in the office for performance, operational and or team needs, determined by the manager.

6. Managing Teams

Skills needed to manage teams in an agile environment

Good people management skills underpin our ways of working. Employees should be valued and trusted for their performance rather than their presence at a set location. Employees' contribution may be less obvious to a line manager who is not present to see the impact. Managers should therefore focus on what the employee achieves (the outcome) and how they achieve it.

For our ways of working to be effective employees need to understand:

- What they are expected to do – managers should set clear objectives and be clear what outcomes are expected and give clear deadlines
- The method of agreeing/monitoring workload
- How success will be measured
- What communication is required from them
- How the line manager will communicate with them
- What decisions they can take without reference to their manager

For an employee to work in this way they need to demonstrate adaptability being willing to adopt new working practices and technology. This way of working also requires a high level of trust between managers and employees.

A programme of learning and development is available to help develop and refresh manager's skills and behaviours to support the management of agile teams.

Underpinning requirements of agile working

- Clear and realistic objectives should be agreed between the employee and their manager to enable their performance to be managed by outcomes rather than presence. This should be reviewed on a regular basis through the 'My Conversation' process. Employees will be expected to deliver the outcomes agreed with their manager.
- Staff should normally only come into the office for a purpose (project / meeting / administrative function/onboarding new starters). Exceptions apply for those who need to be designated office workers or for well-being reasons.
- Large scale team meetings should continue to be held remotely.
- Staff can come into the office for part days and book desks for part days.
- Staff should come into the office for identified training needs which is integral to their role or considered a corporate need.

Communication

Through our Survey we understand that our people haven't always felt fully connected to the organisation – the need to be kept informed is very important.

Managers should agree how they will keep their team informed of key information and team news especially if employees are not typically physically present in the same place. For example, periodic team meetings may be scheduled to bring team members together. Teams need to decide:

- How they communicate and share information
- How they will make it clear when and where they are working – e.g. via keeping outlook calendars up to date.
- How employees that are working remotely can be contacted – e.g. by using MS Teams or a work mobile.

Team cohesion

When working in different locations and at different times, social relationships need to be maintained and appropriate online and offline mechanisms need to be developed, such as buddy schemes for new recruits, regular team meetings, staff briefings etc.

Agile workers require more autonomy, and to be trusted to make their own choices about how to organise their working lives. It involves a new kind of dialogue with staff, based on clarity of expectations and good communications and much more trust.

It is the responsibility of teams to look out for each other, and in particular for managers of dispersed teams to spot problems and resolve them before they become major issues. These may be teased out through regular conversations, or clues may be spotted in terms of performance. If necessary, the manager and team member can agree an alternative work style. It is about finding the right work style for the individual, and about providing the appropriate support to overcome the particular problem.

7. Home working

Through our Survey we know that 92% of respondents wish to: continue working at home for the majority of the time, just going into the office for specific events or; agree a flexible approach working in the office as and when required each week or; to agree set days for working from home and in the office each week. The remaining 8% want to work in the office for the whole of their working week. The Councils approach to Agile working should enable preferences to be met in most cases.

The most appropriate approach to working will be agreed with the manager and will likely include some working from home.

Although agile workers will not necessarily work standard office hours (unless the role dictates this), it is important to agree a work programme so that other team members are aware of the individual's working pattern, where they are located and know when and how to contact them. This allows employees who are using their homes as part of their agile working arrangements, to have a right to privacy out of hours and be able to separate their working and home lives.

8. Fully Home Working

In exceptional circumstances it may be appropriate for someone to work completely at home, i.e., where the normal place of work is at home with no desk or office space provision at any council site. Also, it may be possible in some circumstances for an employee to live in another part of the country or even the world. However, the conditions will be more complex for this and there needs to be significant consideration given to a request by the individual, the line manager and Head of Service.

Should this be approved the employment terms and conditions will change and an addendum to the employment contract will be issued.

9. Health and Safety

Employees have a responsibility for their own and others' health and safety while they are carrying out work activities regardless of the work location in accordance with the Council's Health and Safety Policy. The same duties under the Health & Safety at Work Act continue to apply. Work must be able to be done safely and equipment and information must be safely and securely stored according to council's guidelines.

When working from home the employee has a responsibility to ensure they have an appropriate workspace with adequate security, storage and screening from activities and noise in the rest of the home. There must also be adequate ventilation and lighting. Employees must not carry out work meetings in their home with customers, elected members or officers from other agencies.

If homeworkers need to attend site meetings direct from home, they must follow the Council's Lone Working Policy

The Council has a generic risk assessment template that covers working from home that Line Managers can adopt or amend as appropriate. Line managers should ensure that any of their team who routinely work from home can implement the controls in the Team's risk assessment.

Line managers should seek advice from the Corporate Health and Safety Team for any risks for which they cannot determine an appropriate control.

Employees must confirm that they will notify the Council if any changes occur following the assessment. All reasonable steps to ensure that working conditions continue to comply with Health and Safety requirements must be undertaken.

All accidents and injuries which occur in the course of the employee's homeworking should be reported in the usual way.

Where employees use other Council locations to work they should familiarise themselves with the local arrangements for managing health and safety. They should ensure they are aware of fire safety arrangements to ensure they are fully conversant with the actions to be taken in the event of discovering a fire or on hearing the fire alarm signal and ensure they adhere to the local signing in and out arrangements.

Due consideration to lone working arrangements should be explored fully between the line manager and employee to ensure safe working arrangements are in place.

10. ICT Security and Data Protection

The Council provides employees with access to the personal and confidential information they need to do their job. This information must not be disclosed to others who are not authorised to see it and the security of council information and equipment is of utmost importance.

When working in a mobile way or from home all members of staff who hold or collect personal data are responsible for their own compliance with data protection law and must ensure that personal and / or sensitive information is kept and processed in accordance with UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR), the Data Protection Act 2018 and the Council's Data Protection Policy

Working from home may result in information being held outside the office environment for a longer period of time and the security of documents is of high importance. The key thing

to remember if you are working at home, or anywhere else away from your usual office space, is that the same data protection and security principles apply as they would if you were in the office.

Managers should ensure that they are aware of issues concerning protection of sensitive and confidential data, and protection of data from accidental loss. Any issues concerning data should be reported to the Data Protection team as soon as it is discovered and if the issue involves ICT equipment in any way it should be reported to the ICT Service Desk immediately so that systems can be made secure.

Please refer to the  [ICT Security Policy](#), the  [ICT Acceptable Use Policy](#) and the  [Data Protection Policy](#) for more information.

11. Allocation of Equipment and Other Financial Support

The manager, in consultation with the employee will determine their workstyle/activity. ICT will be responsible for determining and providing the equipment and technical requirements for the employee undertaking an Agile working arrangement.

Personally adapted equipment will be provided to an individual should a Workstation Assessment deem this necessary; however, this equipment will be provided at the place where they predominantly work and not across multiple sites. Therefore, the individual will be responsible for ensuring that this equipment is available for their use wherever they work.

Corporate mobile devices (e.g., laptops) provide remote access functionality and guidance on using this feature is available from ICT team. If additional or new equipment is required to support mobile working, then an ICT system request should be made by the employee and authorised by the appropriate manager.

The employee should use the Council's equipment whilst Agile Working and will not be eligible to claim expenses for use of personal equipment such as home phone lines or printers.

Any abuse of a mobile working arrangement may lead to the retrieval of ICT equipment and possibly to disciplinary action depending on the circumstances. Employees must be able to work from home free from distractions and any form of mobile working or homeworking should not be used in place of caring responsibilities.

Any additional costs incurred by working from home e.g. energy or heating costs, broadband supply, will be met by the employee, in the same way that any savings made by working from home, such as saving on travel expenses, will be gained by the employee.

The Council is aware of working from home tax relief, which employees can claim from HMRC. The Council are **not** responsible for claiming this tax relief on behalf of employees.

(<https://www.gov.uk/tax-relief-for-employees/working-at-home>). This allowance helps offset costs for utility charges.

12. Insurance, Mortgages and Tenancy Agreements

Most home contents insurance policies cover “clerical or administrative duties” and for occasional home working this would suffice. However, it is worth checking with your insurance company as to the extent of their definition and where there is any change in premium. This is likely to be minimal and information suggests may even be cheaper due to the increased presence in the home. All corporate ICT equipment is covered by the Council’s own insurance and warranties for loss or damage.

Formal notification to mortgage lenders or landlords to obtain their agreement to the partial use of home premises for work may also be required and it’s advised to check.

13. Review

This agile working guide and approach will be reviewed as the Council continues the journey of recovery. At this stage, there is no intention to review terms and conditions of employment and for administrative purposes and for the claiming of travel expenses everyone’s contractual base will remain unchanged.



Agile Working – Our Team Protocol

Team Name:

Date created:

Date last reviewed/updated:

Agile working underpins the principle that work is an activity we do rather than a place we go. We want to capitalise on our new agile working culture to provide an environment where staff and members can thrive.

What we do	How we do it
 <p>How we work <i>The way we make decisions, set outcomes, define expectations, prioritise tasks, focus effort and develop our skills and talents.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How to communicate and share information • The method of agreeing/monitoring workload • How success will be measured • How to maintain team cohesion when team members are working in more agile ways • How we ensure that excellent service delivery is maintained 	<p>Clear and realistic objectives should be agreed between the employee and their manager to enable their performance to be managed by outcomes rather than presence.</p>



Where we work

The types of spaces we need to deliver our services in a way that best meet the needs of customers.

- Think about the tasks that you need to complete and where you can do these most effectively
- Minimise the time during your working day that you spend travelling to different locations to reduce the need for unnecessary travel
- Detail any set periods or situations when employees are required to come into the work base
- Using digital approaches to enable better collaboration and sharing of information, regardless of location

To provide the best service possible this is where we will work:



When we work

Agreeing working arrangements that balance individual needs and the needs of the service (which must take priority)

- Any fixed hours of business that must be covered and the cover arrangements that apply
- Employees are valued for their performance rather than the number of hours they work and their presence at a set location
- Encouraging greater autonomy and flexibility over working times to find a more effective blend between

How you work your contracted hours should be agreed with your manager but the needs of the service and customers and impact on other team members must be considered

work responsibilities and our commitments and life outside of work	
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SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

WORK PROGRAMME 2022/23

Thursday 19 May 2022 **East Suffolk House**

- **Review of the Impact of Flexible Working on the Workforce, Council Resources and Productivity** (Councillor Steve Gallant/Chief Executive)
- **Scrutiny Committee's Forward Work Programme (Standing item)**

Thursday 16 June 2022 **Riverside**

- **Review of the Planning Enforcement Process** (Councillor David Ritchie/Philip Ridley, Head of Planning and Coastal Management)
- **Cabinet Member Scrutiny Session** – Councillor David Ritchie
- **Appointment to Outside Bodies (Scrutiny Function)**
- **Scrutiny Committee's Forward Work Programme (Standing item)**

Thursday 14 July 2022 **East Suffolk House**

- **Review of Council's Progress Following the Declaration of a Climate Emergency** (Councillor James Mallinder/Andy Jarvis, Strategic Director)
- **Cabinet Member Scrutiny Session** – Councillor James Mallinder
- **Scrutiny Committee Annual Report** (Chairman)
- **Scrutiny Committee's Forward Work Programme (Standing item)**

Thursday 15 September 2022 **Riverside**

- **FREE**
- **Cabinet Member Scrutiny Session** – To be confirmed
- **Scrutiny Committee's Forward Work Programme (Standing item)**

Thursday 27 October 2022 **East Suffolk House**

- **Cabinet Member Scrutiny Session** - Councillor Letitia Smith
- **Cabinet Member Scrutiny Session** - Councillor Norman Brooks
- **Scrutiny Committee's Forward Work Programme (Standing item)**

Thursday 17 November 2022 **Riverside**

- **Review of How the Council Engages with Housing Tenants** (Councillor Richard Kerry/Heather Tucker, Head of Housing)
- **Cabinet Member Scrutiny Session** - Stephen Burroughes
- **Scrutiny Committee's Forward Work Programme (Standing item)**

Thursday 15 December 2022 East Suffolk House

- **Sitting as the Council’s Crime and Disorder Committee under the provisions of the Police and Criminal Justice Act:** *Sections 19, 20 and 21 of the Police and Justice Act 2006 require that local authority’s scrutiny structures consider crime and disorder matters. In accordance with Part 3 of the Act, the Crime and Disorder Committee has the power to review or scrutinise the responsible authority in respect of its crime and disorder functions and to make report or recommendations to the local authority on the discharge of those functions.* (Councillor Jepson/Head of Communities)
- **Scrutiny Committee’s Forward Work Programme (Standing item)**

Thursday 19 January 2023 Riverside

- **Review of the Council’s Budget** (Cllr Maurice Cook/Chief Finance Officer):
 - Capital Programme 2023/24 to 2026/27
 - Draft General Fund Budget and Council Tax Report 2023/24
 - Housing Revenue Account Budget Report 2023/24
- **Scrutiny Committee’s Forward Work Programme (Standing item)**

Thursday 16 February 2023 East Suffolk House

- **Review of the Impact the New Integrated Care System will have on Council Services** (Councillor Mary Rudd/Nicole Rickard, Head of Communities)
- **Scrutiny Committee’s Forward Work Programme (Standing item)**

Thursday 16 March 2023 Riverside

- **Review of Democratic Accountability within the Planning Process** (Councillor David Ritchie/Philip Ridley, Head of Planning and Coastal Management)
- **Scrutiny Committee’s Forward Work Programme (Standing item)**

Thursday 20 April 2023 East Suffolk House

- **FREE**