

**EASTSUFFOLK**  
COUNCIL

**East Suffolk House, Riduna Park, Station  
Road, Melton, Woodbridge, 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 Geoff Lynch  
Councillor Mark Newton  
Councillor Keith Robinson  
Councillor Caroline Topping

Members are invited to a **Meeting of the Scrutiny Committee**  
to be held  
on **Thursday 28 May 2020 at 6.30pm**

**This meeting will be conducted remotely, pursuant to the Local Authorities  
and  
Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police  
and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020.**

**The meeting will be facilitated using the Zoom video conferencing system and  
broadcast via the East Suffolk Council YouTube channel  
at <https://youtu.be/n0ghoj9J1Uw>**

An Agenda is set out below.

## Part One – Open to the Public

		Pages
1	<b>Apologies for Absence and Substitutions</b>	
2	<b>Declarations of Interest</b> 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	<b>Minutes of meeting 23 January 2020</b> To confirm as a correct record the Minutes of the Meeting held on 23 January 2020	<b>1 - 13</b>
4	<b>Review of Postal Voting and Count arrangements at the District and European Elections in East Suffolk in 2019 ES/0181</b> Report of the Chief Executive, as Returning Officer	<b>14 - 19</b>
5	<b>Cabinet Member's update</b> To receive an update on the Cabinet Member's portfolio and strategic priorities	
6	<b>Scrutiny Committee's Forward Work Programme</b> To consider the Committee's Forward Work Programme	

## Part Two – Exempt/Confidential

Pages

There are no Exempt or Confidential items for this Agenda.

**Close**



Stephen Baker, Chief Executive

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East Suffolk Council is committed to achieving excellence in elected member development  
[www.local.gov.uk/Community-Leadership](http://www.local.gov.uk/Community-Leadership)

**Unconfirmed**

Minutes of a Meeting of the **Scrutiny Committee** held in the Conference Room, Riverside,  
Lowestoft on **Thursday, 23 January 2020 at 6.30 pm**

**Members of the Committee present:**

Councillor Edward Back, Councillor Stuart Bird, Councillor Judy Cloke, Councillor Linda Coulam, Councillor Mike Deacon, Councillor Andree Gee, Councillor Louise Gooch, Councillor Tracey Green, Councillor Geoff Lynch, Councillor Mark Newton

**Other Members present:**

Councillor Stephen Burroughes, Councillor Maurice Cook, Councillor Steve Gallant, Councillor David Ritchie, Councillor Craig Rivett, Councillor Mary Rudd, Councillor Letitia Smith

**Officers present:**

Nick Khan (Strategic Director), Sandra Lewis (Business Solutions Manager), Matt Makin (Democratic Services Officer), Brian Mew (Interim Finance Manager), Lorraine Rogers (Finance Manager)

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**Reordering of the Agenda**

The Chairman opened the meeting and announced that, as the Leader of the Council had been unavoidably delayed on his way to the meeting, the agenda would be reordered and item 6 of the agenda would be heard after item 3 and before item 4.

*Councillors Gooch and Green were not present when the meeting opened.*

**1 Apologies for Absence and Substitutions**

Apologies of absence were received from Councillors David Beavan, Keith Robinson and Caroline Topping.

Councillor Kay Yule substituted for Councillor Beavan, Councillor Tony Cooper substituted for Councillor Robinson, and Councillor Ed Thompson substituted for Councillor Topping.

**2 Declarations of Interest**

No declarations of interest were made.

**3 Minutes**

**RESOLVED**

That the Minutes of the Meeting held on 16 December 2019 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

**6 Draft General Fund Budget and Council Tax Report 2020/21**

The Committee received report **ES/0084** of the Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member with responsibility for Resources.

The report was presented by Councillor Cook, the Assistant Cabinet Member for Resources. He noted that the report detailed the Draft General Fund Budget for 2020/21 and contained an updated Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS), the latter having been previously considered at a draft stage by the Committee at its meeting on 16 December 2019.

Councillor Cook advised that the report enabled the Committee to review, consider and comment upon the Draft General Fund Budget for 2020/21 and submit its comments to Cabinet ahead of its meeting on 4 February 2020, where it will make its recommendations on the Draft General Fund Budget for 2020/21 to Full Council.

The Committee was informed that the MTFS had been further revised since the draft version was considered at the Committee's meeting on 16 December 2019. The Local Government Financial Settlement had been issued on 20 December 2019, which confirmed the proposals outlined in the technical consultation issued in October 2019. At the time of the report being written the final settlement had not been issued but no changes from the provisional settlement were expected.

Councillor Cook stated that since the publication of the report, the business rate retention figures had been updated, inviting the Interim Finance Manager to address the Committee on this.

The Interim Finance Manager tabled the updated figures and explained that the figures were based on the NNDR1 return that the Council was required to submit by 31 January 2020. He advised that the figures tabled at the meeting had only recently been calculated and had been produced by the Finance team alongside the Anglia Revenues Partnership (ARP) earlier that week. It was confirmed that the updated figures would be included in the report that would be presented to Cabinet at its meeting on 4 February 2020. The figures were subject to confirmation on submission of the NNDR1 return, but it was not envisaged that there would be any changes to them.

*Councillor Green arrived at the meeting at this point of the meeting (6.42 pm).*

The Interim Finance Manager spoke on the revised figures tabled and noted that they were broadly the same as what had been published in the report, with the exception of the position on renewable energy, which would be detailed at the Cabinet meeting on 4 February 2020.

The Committee was informed that the Council, as the billing authority, could retain 100% of renewable energy business rates compared to 40% of other business rates. The Interim Finance Manager explained that during the 2018/19 and 2019/20

financial years several renewable energy projects had come online and had been included in the rating income under the 40% retention.

The revised figures were a result of the ARP reviewing all energy related projects and identifying those that were eligible for 100% retention. The Interim Finance Manager assured the Committee that business rates on these premises had been collected by the Council but that central government had been paid its share rather than the Council retaining the full amount collected. The figures reflected the adjustment for this for the current and previous year.

The Interim Finance Manager noted that unknowns around renewable energy business rate incentives meant that there was no guarantee on that income for the last three years of the MTFS, suggesting that there may be new incentives in place for energy projects coming online in the future.

Councillor Cook continued outlining the report to the Committee, highlighting the uncertainties around the charges from Norse for services provided, which were subject to continual review, challenge and discussion. He added that the report also provided information on the Council Tax reduction scheme along with information on the Council's reserves and its efficiency strategy for 2020/21, the latter to be updated following the approval of the Council's new Strategic Plan.

The Finance Manager was invited to comment on the ongoing partnership discussions with Norse, detailed at paragraph 5.2 of the report. She advised that another meeting with Norse was due to take place in the next week and it was hoped that a verbal update on the outcome of this meeting could be given to Cabinet at its meeting on 4 February 2020.

The Committee was informed by Councillor Cook that it had been confirmed that the Council's contribution to the Suffolk Pension Fund was 98% funded and that there would be no need in future years for any debt reduction payment, and payments would be serviced from normal deductions.

Councillor Cook outlined the recommendations, as set out in the report.

The Chairman invites questions to Councillor Cook and the Finance officers.

The Interim Finance Manager confirmed the change in the renewable energy business rate retention figure was a result of a review of both the 2018/19 and 2019/20 financial years. He reiterated that changes to business rate retention had been delayed; the changes were now likely to take effect in 2021/22 having originally been due to take effect in 2020/21, as the Government had only completed a one-year spending round and settlement with changes being delayed by the 2019 General Election.

Councillor Cook confirmed that there were sufficient reserves to honour the commitments made by the Leader of the Council in respect of the Enabling Communities Budgets and the new Community Partnerships.

*Councillor Gallant, The Leader of the Council, arrived at this point of the meeting (6.50 pm).*

The Vice-Chairman sought comment from Councillor Cook on the impact of the uncertainty of Government funding on the forward planning of the Council. Councillor Cook considered that the Council was in a better than anticipated situation at present as the Local Government Finance Settlement had been continued for another year. He noted that the Government was looking to review the whole funding process for local government and had indicated that there would be one central funding scheme.

Councillor Cook acknowledged that there was no certainty at this stage about the outcome of this review and that the Council was planning ahead as much as it could. He noted that the Council was opting to raise the Council Tax precept incrementally in order to avoid a significant single-year increase that would be both unpopular and imprudent. Councillor Cook expressed confidence in the plans being made by the Finance team and that reserves had been earmarked for all eventualities.

The Chairman noted the growing budget gap forecast to 2022/23 and asked what plans were in place to control, manage or reduce that forecast. Councillor Cook confirmed that this forecast was under constant review and that a similar deficit had been faced a year ago, which had been addressed by Heads of Services identifying and making savings within their departments. He highlighted that projects were in place to further reduce the Council's costs and increase its income and that these would be considered by the Cabinet. Councillor Cook was confident that a balanced budget could be presented for 2021/22.

Councillor Cook noted that negotiations were ongoing with Norse regarding a single contract for East Suffolk in order to make efficiency savings, highlighting the challenges of doing so. He said that the two separate Suffolk Coastal and Waveney Norse joint ventures would become East Suffolk Norse in April 2020.

The Chairman thanked Councillor Cook and the Finance officers for a thorough report.

The Chairman invited the Committee to debate the report.

There being no debate the Chairman moved to the recommendations, as set out in the report. A typographical error was noted in the sixth recommendation, which stated 2019/20 rather than 2020/21. It was confirmed that this error would be amended in the Minutes of the Meeting.

On the proposition of Councillor Lynch, seconded by Councillor Back it was by a unanimous vote

**RESOLVED**

That it be recommended to Cabinet and Council

1. That the General Fund Revenue Budget, as set out in this report and summarised in Appendix A5, be approved and that the budget forecast for 2021/22 and beyond be noted;

2. That the Reserves and Balances movements as presented in Appendix A6 be approved;
3. That no further changes be made to Council Tax Discounts and Premiums for 2020/21 be approved;
4. That the Efficiency Strategy attached as Appendix B be approved;
5. That the Council Tax Base of 87,888.87 for 2020/21 be noted; and
6. That a Band D Council Tax for 2020/21 of £171.27 be approved.

#### **4 Cabinet Member's update**

The Chairman informed the Committee that it would be receiving an update at each meeting from a different Cabinet Member on his/her portfolio and that the Committee would have the opportunity to ask questions. These updates would last for a maximum of 45 minutes with 10 minutes for the Cabinet Member to make his/her presentation and 35 minutes for members of the Committee to ask questions.

The Chairman advised that the first of these updates would be from Councillor Gallant, Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member with responsibility for Resources, inviting him to address the Committee.

Councillor Gallant tabled a document detailing the key themes and aims of the Council alongside related actions and achievements.

Councillor Gallant informed the Committee that it had been his ambition since becoming Leader of the Council that every Member, regardless of party or position, feels he/she has a part to play in the Council moving forwards. He said that he wanted the Council to be inclusive and working together to deliver change and efficiency for the residents of East Suffolk.

The five key themes and aims, as promised in the Conservative manifesto for the 2019 Local Elections, were highlighted. Councillor Gallant acknowledged that his Conservative Group councillors had been elected against this manifesto and also considered the commitments made in his speech at the Annual Council meeting on 22 May 2019, when he was elected as Leader of the Council. He wanted to highlight the achievements to date and how they aligned with the new East Suffolk Strategic Plan.

Councillor Gallant stressed the need for financial sustainability in order for the Council to grow and prosper, stating that this would be achieved through delivering the current budget position and planning for challenges in the longer term. He acknowledged the financial uncertainties ahead, acknowledging the need for Councillor Cook, his Assistant Cabinet Member for Resources, and the Finance officers to err on the side of caution. Councillor Gallant stated that he was looking forward and seeing a bright future for the Council.

Councillor Gallant listed some of the achievements made since he had become Leader of the Council:

- the appointment of a new Cabinet to bring together people with the skill sets to deliver on objectives and work together in a harmonious way with other Members and officers, and who had the ambition to deliver a positive, engaging Cabinet for the benefit of the wider Council

- regular meetings with the Leaders of the two opposition groups, which took place immediately after Cabinet Briefing meetings, to inform the opposition groups of forward planning and receive their influence and feedback before reports were presented to Cabinet. Councillor Gallant considered his relationships with the Leaders of the two opposition groups were good and enabled open and honest dialogue. It was the intention to increase the engagement of Cabinet with all Ward Members, so it was aware of local issues
- the development of the relationship between Members and officers so that all moved forward together as 'one council', rather than having a 'Member led' or 'officer led' council, acknowledging the key role of officers in delivering the Council's objectives

Councillor Gallant gave a positive example of the relationship between Members and officers, noting a recent visit from Members and officers of another council who, when noting the close relationship between Councillor Gallant and the Chief Executive when giving a presentation, highlighted that there was a very distant relationship between Members and officers at their own authority.

The Chairman invited questions to Councillor Gallant.

Councillor Gallant said that at the end of the current four-year cycle, he saw East Suffolk Council being well respected and delivering efficient and effective services. He wanted to see the Council enabling communities and improving the quality of life for its citizens and stressed the importance of the Community Partnerships in delivering against that ambition. He highlighted that the new council had received a positive reception from outside bodies, noting the positive relationship between the Council and Lowestoft Town Council, given the fraught relationship between the latter and Waveney District Council, and how this would deliver for Lowestoft.

In response to a question on the biggest challenge to achieving those ambitions, Councillor Gallant considered this to be continuing the stability currently enjoyed by the Council. He said it was his intention to remain as Leader and that he was looking to the future but said that challenges, such as the financial ones highlighted in the previous report considered by the Committee, would impact on this. He said he was pleased to see the Independent Remuneration Panel's (IRP) report be approved unanimously by Full Council the previous evening.

When asked about the development of housing stock in the former Suffolk Coastal area and bringing services currently handled by Norse back 'in house', Councillor Gallant said that it was positive that the new council inherited such a well-managed housing stock from Waveney District Council along with a skilled trade staff to enable to run a rolling maintenance programme without relying on external contracts, and stated that there were ambitions to grow this stock into the former Suffolk Coastal area in the south of the District.

On the subject of Norse services, Councillor Gallant noted that all aspects of the Norse contracts were being reviewed as there were now two years left to run on these contracts. He acknowledged the disparity between some of the services provided by Norse and assured the Committee that the review would look to see if these contracts were fit for purpose for East Suffolk Council.

Councillor Gallant stated that the environmental agenda was key to delivery and was one of the Council's five themes. He highlighted that the Environment Task Group had been formed and was meeting in a regular basis and was already having a positive impact. He noted that there was no single solution to the environmental challenges faced by the Council and that it was learning and evolving on this issue.

The Chairman asked if Councillor Gallant intended to fill the Resources portfolio, which he held in addition as being Leader of the Council, and if he intended to allocate Assistant Cabinet Members to all portfolios. He also asked Councillor Gallant what his motivation had been to stand for Leader.

*Councillor Gooch arrived at this point of the meeting (7.27 pm).*

Councillor Gallant confirmed that he had left it to the discretion of individual Cabinet Members to state if they required an Assistant Cabinet Member, noting the differing demands of each portfolio. He noted that in his case, the workload of the Resources portfolio had required him to appoint an Assistant Cabinet Member for Resources.

Councillor Gallant said that he had been able to identify Councillor Cook as a suitable candidate for this role following a skills audit of all 55 councillors to establish the background and skills of each Member, and it was his intention to appoint him as Cabinet Member with responsibility for Resources in the near future. Councillor Gallant also detailed his visit to each Ward in the District to learn more about each area and the local people.

In regard to his motivation to be Leader of the Council, Councillor Gallant acknowledged that he had only been a District Councillor for four years at Suffolk Coastal District Council before being elected to East Suffolk Council in 2019, and had been a Cabinet Member for all of that time. He said that this had allowed him to learn at an early stage that it was not always possible to know what was going on if you were outside of senior Member roles.

Councillor Gallant stated that he had considered that the first Leader of East Suffolk Council should not have been either one of the Leaders of its predecessor authorities as it was a new council and this would have appeared, both internally and externally, like one authority taking over the other. He said that he had stood for Leader because of his ambition to make East Suffolk Council an inclusive authority for all its Members regardless of their position. He noted that he sent regular updates to all Members to achieve this and was committed to delivering the agenda he had outlined in his presentation.

A member of the Committee acknowledged the ongoing pressures on local government to deliver services and that district authorities had started to take on services traditionally delivered by County authorities. He asked Councillor Gallant what services may be delegated to the Council by Suffolk County Council in the near future, noting the current issues facing that authority in continuing to support the Citizens' Advice Bureaux.

Councillor Gallant agreed that the role of district councils had changed and highlighted that he had been criticised in the past for focusing on issues that were not normally

within the purview of district and borough authorities. He said that such authorities were not just responsible for cutting the grass and emptying the bins but were there to provide for their communities and improve things for their residents. He said that the Community Partnerships being established was a good example of this.

Councillor Gallant acknowledged the budgetary constraints of Suffolk County Council and its reduction of services such as bus routes. He considered that in this example there was a need for the Council to step in and help deliver sustainable community transport that would enable communities and address issues such as social isolation, education standards and childhood obesity.

The same member of the Committee advised that he was also a Town Councillor and said that there was pressure at that level to deliver on the green agenda, expressing concerns that the Council would not be able to deliver on its environmental targets. He said that councils were being given problems and not solutions and asked what the Council could do about this.

Councillor Gallant said that there was no easy solution to environmental issues and that no single action would resolve them. He highlighted that tree planting was cited as an essential action but this ran contrary to the maintenance of the Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB which required self-seeded trees to be removed to protect that environment. Councillor Gallant said that this was similar in the renewable energy sector as offshore wind power, although beneficial to the environment, had an environmental impact through its infrastructure to bring that power ashore. He said that joined up working nationally was required to resolve these issues.

It was also noted that the Council's Environment Task Group had real and measurable ambitions, highlighting the survey commissioned to see if solar panels could be installed on the roof of East Suffolk House. Councillor Gallant said that to meet climate change ambitions actions needed to happen at the right speed, at the right time and that he had asked Councillor Mallinder, Cabinet Member with responsibility for The Environment, to engage with the wider community to see what actions could be taken by the Council and what pressure it should put on the Government.

In response to questions regarding the lack of engagement from both the local Highways Authority and Highways England, Councillor Gallant advised that the Suffolk County Council reporting tool was a useful route for engagement as it provided a reference number. He noted that he had appointed Councillor Normal Brooks as Cabinet Member with responsibility for Transport, a portfolio which neither Suffolk Coastal nor Waveney District Council had appointed to in their respective Cabinets, and that Councillor Brooks was developing a good level of communication between the Council and the local Highways Authority.

Councillor Gallant added that Councillor Brooks was also working on improving communications with Highways England and encouraged Members to report any problems reporting issues to them.

Another member of the Committee asked how Councillor Gallant considered the other group leaders influenced him as Leader of the Council. Councillor Gallant said that he had recently stated in an email to Members that he did not think that the Conservative

Group had all the good ideas, and that he was receptive to good ideas coming from all groups. He was of the view that any opposition Member could approach him and was happy to deal with issues, such as the Fairtrade question raised at Full Council at its last meeting, outside of the formal meeting environment.

The Chairman asked what realistic plans there were to broaden the types of people standing to be a councillor, noting the IRP's recommendations within its recent report to Full Council.

Councillor Gallant noted that the increase in Members' Allowances would help bring a more diverse pool of candidates forward but stated that money was not the primary driver for someone to stand for elected office and said he wanted to motivate people to come forward by providing opportunities for councillors to make a difference. He advised that the Member Development Panel was looking to instil this message in prospective candidates for the 2023 Local Elections.

A member of the Committee referenced Councillor Gallant's visits to each Ward and asked if he was planning to undertake a similar exercise during the remainder of his current term of office. Councillor Gallant advised that he had no immediate plans to repeat the exercise due to the large time commitment it would require and encouraged Members to approach him at any time regarding issues in their Wards.

*Councillor Cloke left the Conference Room between 8.00 pm and 8.03 pm.*

Another member of the Committee noted the large geography and population of the District and the Council having two headquarters and asked what Councillor Gallant considered to be the challenges to creating a sense of unity.

Councillor Gallant said that a sense of unity had begun to develop since the creation of East Suffolk Council and acknowledged the large travelling distances within the District. He said that it was important to encourage town and parish councils to engage with the Council, highlighting the low turnout at recent briefings regarding the Draft General Fund Budget for 2020/21. Councillor Gallant considered that there was an opportunity for Ward Members to help develop this.

There being no further questions, the Chairman thanked Councillor Gallant for attending the meeting.

## 5 East Suffolk Strategic Plan

The Committee received report **ES/0213** of the Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member with responsibility for Resources. The report set out the Council's Strategic Plan for the period to 2024.

Councillor Gallant, the Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member with responsibility for Resources, gave a presentation on the Strategic Plan. He highlighted the need for a new plan as a new council; the previous East Suffolk Business Plan had been adopted in 2015 as a shared plan between Suffolk Coastal and Waveney District Councils. Councillor Gallant was supported by the Strategic Director and the Business Solutions Manager.

The Committee was advised that the new Strategic Plan would guide the way that the Council made decisions. Councillor Gallant said that there was a need to build upon the good things done by the Council's predecessor authorities and continue the levels of success already achieved.

The five themes of the Plan were identified as:

- Growing our economy
- Enabling our communities
- Financial sustainability
- Digital transformation
- Our environment

Digital transformation was stated as being key to the Strategic Plan. Councillor Gallant advised that 96% of the UK population owned a smartphone and that the way people engaged with each other and wider society had changed significantly. Councillor Gallant wanted the Council to make a meaningful digital transformation and keep up with modern technology and make interacting with the Council's services as simple as possible.

The process of creating the new Strategic Plan, to date, was detailed:

- Staff consultations undertaken in January/February 2019
- The 'Hothouse' Event in October 2019
  - 81 attendees
  - Members/Officers/Partners
  - Local data and knowledge
- Analysis of the 'Hothouse' output
  - October 2019
  - All eight teams' work
- Further consultation
  - November/December 2019
  - SMT
  - Leader of the Council

Councillor Gallant advised that this process had culminated in the plan that was before the Committee. He said the aim had been to create a document that was concise, understandable, friendly, at a strategic level, and meaningful to whoever is reading it. The Committee was informed that it was reviewing the content of the report and that the final report for publication would be developed by the Communications Team over the next month, to present to Full Council.

It was the intention that the new Strategic Plan would be 'digital by default' and that its design would reflect this. The Council's logo, a compass point, would be incorporated to reflect that the plan was a directional document.

The Strategic Plan's was stated to be a strategic document which highlighted the key priorities of each of its themes. It would be important to identify if the Council was delivering to the plan; how it would achieve this would be detailed within subsequent delivery programmes and the Council's service plans.

Councillor Gallant highlighted that each theme was covered on a single page which outlined the directional statement, the key priorities (with explanatory text), how the Council would understand its performance on its priorities and the overarching theme.

Councillor Gallant highlighted each of the themes' key priorities and the outcomes from delivery.

It was proposed that a governance board would oversee the delivery of the plan, which would consist of SMT, the Leader of the Council, and Cabinet Members. It would review strategic risks and performance, reporting to the Cabinet on the overall direction of the authority.

It was confirmed that each theme would be supported by a delivery programme which would be sponsored by the relevant Cabinet Member, who would receive briefings on progress and delivery. Each programme would be overseen by relevant Heads of Service and all projects and service plans would feed into the five key themes.

Councillor Gallant suggested that this governance board would meet quarterly to focus on the work and direction of the Council.

It was confirmed that the plan would be presented to the Cabinet on 4 February 2020, at staff briefings on 10 and 11 February 2020, and at Full Council on 26 February 2020. During this period, there was to be further development of new ways of performance reporting, service planning and the governance arrangements.

Councillor Gallant drew the Committee's attention to the appendices of the report.

The Chairman invited questions to Councillor Gallant and the officers.

A member of the Committee suggested some grammatical changes to the five key themes to make them clear statements of what the Council was doing. Councillor Gallant acknowledged these suggestions and said that they would be taken into consideration.

The member of the Committee also expressed concern regarding 'Growing the economy' and suggested that it needed to be clear that this did not relate to overconsumption as was made clear in the remainder of the document.

Councillor Gallant acknowledged the point but did not completely agree with it; he said that when the plan was in a digital format it would be clear that it would be clear that this theme did not relate to overconsumption.

Another member of the Committee suggested that the corners of the border of Appendix B could show other areas of the community feeding into the plan. Councillor Gallant agreed with this suggestion.

In response to comments regarding the target audience of the document, Councillor Gallant confirmed that during the process of creating the Strategic Plan various 'jargon' words had been removed from the document in order to make it accessible.

A member of the Committee suggested that the McKinsey 7s framework could be used to present the Strategic Plan's key themes. She also asked for clarity on how the document would be accessed and if there would be a dedicated page for it on the East Suffolk website.

Councillor Gallant, following further clarification around the McKinsey 7s framework, noted that it could be considered for the Strategic Plan, but this would need to be looked at in detail. He confirmed that the Strategic Plan would be an online-only document and that a link to it would be advertised through all of the Council's communications channels. Councillor Gallant also anticipated adding a link to the Strategic Plan to the corporate email signature block used by Members and officers.

Regarding the ordering of the key themes, Councillor Gallant said that this had come about from the order in which they had been identified.

The Vice-Chairman commented that he liked the Strategic Plan and considered the 'Hothouse' exercise to have been an excellent event. He highlighted that he had been a District Councillor for many years, mostly as an opposition Member, and that this was the first time he had been fully involved in creating such a plan. He gave his thanks to Councillor Gallant and the officers for this opportunity.

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

There being no debate the Chairman moved to the recommendation, as set out in the report.

On the proposition of Councillor Deacon, seconded by Councillor Cloke it was by unanimous vote

## **RESOLVED**

That the East Suffolk Strategic Plan be recommended for approval by Full Council.

## **7 Scrutiny Committee's Forward Work Programme**

The Scrutiny Committee received and reviewed its current forward work programme.

It was confirmed that Councillor Reid, Cabinet Member for Highways, Transport and Rural Affairs at Suffolk County Council, would attend the Committee's next meeting on 26 March 2020 to make a presentation on the processes and management associated with road closures.

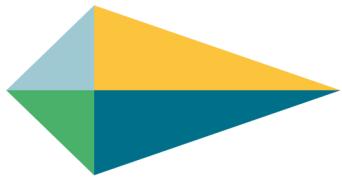
Following robust discussion, the Committee requested a briefing from the Economic Development team on what the Council was doing to help regenerate the economy, particularly in high streets within the District's more deprived areas. The Chairman asked that the Democratic Services Officer contact the relevant officers to organise this briefing.

The Committee added two suggested future topics to its work programme:

- Civil Parking Enforcement (CPE): To consider a review of CPE six to nine months from ESC taking responsibility for it in April 2020
- Community Partnerships: To consider a review of the Community Partnerships, once established

The meeting concluded at 9.00 pm

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Chairman



**EASTSUFFOLK**  
COUNCIL

## SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Thursday 28 May 2020

### A REVIEW OF POSTAL VOTING AND COUNT ARRANGEMENTS AT THE DISTRICT AND EUROPEAN ELECTIONS IN EAST SUFFOLK IN 2019

#### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. This report reviews two issues raised with the Scrutiny Committee following the District and European elections in 2019 namely, concerns about the delivery of postal votes and the time taken to input data at the count.
2. Postal Votes: the issue of the delivery of postal votes has been reviewed. The whole process of issuing postal votes is strictly controlled by a pre-determined electoral timetable. Where a postal vote is not delivered, strict checks must be implemented before a replacement postal vote can be issued. There are various reasons why a postal vote may not be delivered, including voter error and a delivery error by the postal system. It is acknowledged that sometimes an administrative error may occur and a postal vote may not be issued where it has been requested by a voter.
3. Data Input: the process of data input has been reviewed by the management of the Electoral Services function. Given the need to ensure the absolute accuracy of the count, and the result of the election, results are inputted into an Electoral Services system in order to reduce the scope for error to an absolute minimum. The review of the District election has acknowledged that the number of seats being counted, and therefore the number of results to be declared, did cause an inputting delay at the count. This will be resolved in future by adding extra input screens to the count process.
4. The Scrutiny Committee is invited to consider the conclusions of this review of the issues raised and to note the conclusions reached.

Is the report Open or Exempt?	Open
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Wards Affected:	All
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## **1 INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 East Suffolk Council has a duty to provide electoral management services for its local electorate. This applies to all types of election and referendum for local councils, including Parish, District, County and Parliamentary General Elections. It also includes the administration of elections for electing the Police and Crime Commissioner, for local and national referenda and for votes by local communities on proposed Neighbourhood Plans.
- 1.2 This is a unique service within the Council given that the Returning Officer, who is usually the Chief Executive or a senior member of staff, is formally accountable to the central government department requesting the election, rather than to elected members of their own local authority.
- 1.3 In 2019 the Electoral Services team delivered three elections:
- 2 May 2019 - District Council and Town and Parish Council elections
  - 23 May 2019 - European Parliament election
  - 12 December 2019 – Parliamentary General election
- 1.4 This report is focussed on the elections held on 2 May 2020 (District) and 23 May 2019 (European) and addresses concerns raised at those elections regarding:
- Postal votes
  - Count arrangements

## **2 POSTAL VOTES**

- 2.1 The issue that the Scrutiny Committee wishes to consider is that it was reported that some postal votes had not been delivered and that this disenfranchised the voter who had not received their postal vote.
- 2.2 Process:
- The process for the management of postal votes is determined by the Electoral Commission and is a legal electoral procedure. These processes and timelines are the same for every Electoral Services team across the country; the process determines the dates for the issue and receipt of postal votes and how they are opened and validated. The timeline for this process is made available to the public and in particular Election Agents find this useful as part of their management of their election campaign and to arrange observers to be present when postal votes are received and opened by the Electoral Services team prior to Polling Day.
- 2.3 Each postal vote has a unique number, which is cross referenced with the voter's name, date of birth and signature. If a voter does not receive their postal vote as expected, or if it is destroyed or spoilt for some reason, then a replacement postal vote can be requested. However, the process for issuing replacement postal votes must be carefully scrutinised in order to avoid any potential for electoral fraud. Legislation states that we can only start to replace lost postal votes four working days before the poll.
- 2.4 Postal votes are issued in envelopes that have a special mark, a purple 'flash', that makes them stand out from other postal items. They also have wording on them to make them easily identified.
- 2.5 What were the concerns raised?

Concerns were raised by some candidates and their agents that they were being advised that voters had not received their postal votes. These reports were referred to the Electoral Services team. Given that the Electoral Services team has a responsibility, and a professional obligation, to ensure each voter is able to exercise their right to vote, each report of a missing postal vote was thoroughly investigated.

2.6 It was found that:

- Some voters thought they had registered for a postal vote but, on investigation, it was clear they had not.
- Some postal votes were not delivered at the time expected by Royal Mail.
- Some voters had mislaid or lost their postal vote, or it had inadvertently been destroyed and so a replacement was required.
- Some voters had moved house but omitted to advise the Electoral Services team.
- Some voters who live abroad suffered a delay in the arrival of their postal vote due to the postal system and assumed that it had not arrived.

2.7 As an example, one voter who was resident in France contacted Electoral Services complaining bitterly that she had not received her postal vote and yet her husband had received his. The team quickly established that her vote had been sent, but to a different address to her husband. Her husband later contacted the team and explained that he and his wife had recently moved house in France and whilst he had amended his address on the electoral roll, his wife had failed to do so. He was quite apologetic for her manner on the telephone.

2.8 The Electoral Services team issued a total of 68,026 postal votes across East Suffolk for the two elections and only replaced six as a result of an administrative error.

2.9 Response from the Returning Officer:

The Electoral Services team makes every effort to ensure every voter is able to vote in every election in which they are entitled to vote. If a voter reports that they have not received their vote, then every effort is made to replace that vote. It is possible that, given the number of postal votes processed by the Electoral Services team, occasionally a request for a postal vote is missed. However, often the Electoral Services team are blamed when they are not at fault.

### **3 COUNTING ARRANGEMENTS**

3.1 The issue that the Scrutiny Committee has asked to be reviewed is the time taken to conclude the counting process, immediately prior to the declaration of the result. Comment has been made that the data input took longer than expected.

3.2 Process:

A District Council holds an election to elect councillors to the local authority. In the case of East Suffolk, this requires 55 councillors to be elected which, in turn, requires 55 counts and declarations. The count for a District Council election is, therefore, distinctly different to that of a General Election, which provides one result for a parliamentary constituency.

- 3.3 Once each ballot box is verified (to ensure the number of papers in the box tallies with the number that were issued by the Presiding Officer), the votes are counted to determine the winning candidate. These results are entered into a spreadsheet which is part of the system used by Electoral Services. This records the votes cast and also provides the printed declaration that is used by the Returning Officer to announce the result.
- 3.4 The issue to be addressed is a specific aspect of the counting arrangements and only applies to the District election. The concerns raised referred to the stage in the process, after the ballot papers for each ward have been counted, when the number of votes cast for each candidate, plus the number of spoilt or doubtful papers, are entered into the final spreadsheet on the Electoral Services IT system to check that this matches the verified number of ballot papers that should be in the ballot box. This total will already have been checked and verified for each ballot box earlier in the process.
- 3.5 The time taken for this part of the process can be increased significantly by the number of candidates that stand for a District ward, or Parish Council. This check ensures that no ballot papers have been mislaid, double counted, or missed in the counting process. An accurate count is always essential, for obvious reasons, but this is especially important when the number of votes cast is small, and therefore the winning margin can be narrow, as can be the case with District ward elections, and Town and Parish elections. In addition, there were only three votes between a second and third candidate in one two seat ward which meant we had to recount several times to ensure that the result was consistent and accurate.
- 3.6 What were the concerns raised?
- Some complaints were received from the candidates and agents attending the count that the results took too long to be entered into the system, and so the declarations were unnecessarily delayed.
- 3.7 Response from the Returning Officer:
- The delay in providing the results was apparent at the count. It must be remembered that it is the responsibility of the Returning Officer to provide an accurate result, and key to that is that each ballot paper count, and the total of all the numbers of votes cast for each candidate, is the same as the verified total of papers in the ballot box that was returned from the polling station. Therefore, the process could not be rushed.
- 3.8 However, the speed of the data input process, and of then declaring the results, was acknowledged as being too slow by the Electoral Services team. This issue was noted on the night of the count and in future, more input screens and appropriately skilled staff will be provided to speed up this part of the process.
- 3.9 It should also be noted that this election was the first for East Suffolk Council and there was a considerable sense of excitement and anticipation amongst those watching the results unfold with feelings running high. As a result, it was evident that many of the attendees at the count were especially eager to learn the results of this important election.

#### **4 HOW DOES THIS RELATE TO THE EAST SUFFOLK STRATEGIC PLAN?**

- 4.1 Effective electoral services administration is vital to ensure that voters, political parties, candidates and agents have confidence in the election process. This links with the Business Plan because an effective service enables all those eligible to vote being able to exercise their right.

## **5 FINANCIAL AND GOVERNANCE IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 There are no new financial or governance implications for the Council as a result of the review undertaken.

## **6 CONSULTATION**

- 6.1 No external parties were consulted in the preparation of this report.

## **7 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION**

- 7.1 The issues that the Scrutiny Committee has asked to be investigated have been thoroughly investigated.
- 7.2 The concerns about postal votes have been considered and whilst several reasons have been identified that would cause postal votes to go missing, many of these are outside the control of the Electoral Services team.
- 7.3 The concerns about the delays at the count have been investigated and acknowledged. Indeed, the officers responsible for the management of Electoral Services have already implemented plans to increase the number of screens used for data inputting at future elections in order to avoid a repeat of the delay that occurred in May 2019.

### **RECOMMENDATION**

That the report by the Returning Officer be considered and the conclusions that follow the review of the issues raised be noted.

### **BACKGROUND PAPERS – none**