

## **Civic leadership questions and answers**

### **Why is the West Suffolk Shadow Authority reviewing civic leadership?**

With the creation of a new West Suffolk Council in April 2019, we have the opportunity to redefine the arrangements for civic leadership in order to support our ambitions to drive growth and prosperity in our local communities. The new arrangements need to look to the future while recognising and building on the traditions of the past.

### **What is civic leadership?**

Civic leadership is demonstrated by those that volunteer their time, skills, knowledge and enthusiasm to have a positive impact on individuals, communities and organisations.

All councillors demonstrate civic leadership as part of their role and the 'civic leader' role at a district or borough council is mainly the responsibility of a chairman or mayor. *(Please note that the titles used in the current council constitutions are used in this document. These may be reviewed in the future.)*

### **How is the West Suffolk Councils civic leadership role different to the civic leadership role of a parish or town council?**

Parish councils have a chairman as their civic figurehead and town councils can have either a chairman or a mayor as their civic figurehead. The civic leaders of parish and town councils operate in different ways, but they do also help champion local communities and in so doing support the civic functions.

Part of the Civic Leadership Review is to identify how the civic leadership of West Suffolk could operate in conjunction with other civic leaders, including mayors and chairmen of parish and town councils.

***However, please note that this review will not make any recommendations to changes for the leadership roles of town councils across the area, it is purely focused on defining the civic function for the new West Suffolk Council.***

### **What is the current model for civic leadership?**

At present, the focus of civic leadership for Forest Heath District is the Council Chairman, and for St Edmundsbury Borough Council, the Mayor.

The Chairman or Mayor can be from any political party and they are voted in annually by the council as a whole.

While still a ward councillor, the civic leader, when acting in their capacity as mayor or chairman, is primarily concerned with the council's ceremonial and community role. This might include representing the council at civic events such as Remembrance Day services and religious events, hosting other events and parades and supporting local voluntary, youth or charity groups.

The chairman or mayor also preside over all council meetings.

## **What's the difference between a chairman and a mayor?**

All councils must have a chairman. For some councils, who have a borough charter, this role can be taken by a mayor if they choose to do so. Therefore, if West Suffolk Council successfully applied for a borough charter, it could have either a mayor or chairman as its civic figurehead.

The chairman or mayor and their deputy is elected by the council every year. They preside over all council meetings and also represents the council at social, charitable and civic functions. They continue to carry out the usual duties of a councillor and then have their civic role when they represent the whole council and the local community regardless of their political affiliation.

## **How can the Chairman or Mayor be identified?**

A chairman and a mayor both wear a chain of office. A mayor also wears a robe of office on ceremonial occasions.

Dependent on what decisions are made with regards to the future status of the civic leader, work will be undertaken to determine what will happen to the chains of office and likewise to the Mayor's robes/ memorabilia.

## **Exploring the current roles/requirements of the Mayor and Chairman**

Regardless as to whether the civic leader is a mayor or chairman, their role is to represent the council, recognise and reward our communities for the good work they do and promote the borough economically.

At present, St Edmundsbury protocol requires the Mayor to attend at least 200 events in a year, although the Mayor could be committed to upwards of 400 events. They will host a number of events, some on behalf of the county, including a civic service, Jankyn Smith Memorial (an event to recognise the role of charitable fundraising within Bury St Edmunds), Remembrance Parade, Harvest Festival, St Edmunds Day Service/Celebrations and so on. The Mayor will also select at least one charity for the year, and will organise several events to raise money for their chosen charities.

Likewise, the Chairman hosts and attends civic events, although the number of events they attend is usually less. Last year the number of events attended was approximately 60. The types of events that the Chairman has attended includes,

visiting local community groups, fetes, liaising with the military airbases and representing the authority at Royal visits. The Chairman also supports charities during their term.

Part of the review is to determine the number of and types of events that the new civic leader should be attending in the future. It will also make recommendations about how communities, businesses and the local area are visibly championed, not only by the civic leader, but by councillors and towns and parishes.

## **What is the difference financially between having a chairman and a mayor?**

The financial implications for the roles are predominantly based on what the figurehead role does rather than the type of role. Therefore current funding for the Mayor, who undertakes a bigger range of functions (as outlined above) is higher than the Chairman. Both the Mayor and the Chairman receive an allowance towards expenses incurred during their year in office. This allowance covers clothes, cost of tickets to events, contributions to charitable events where invited and so on. Moving forwards, there is likely to be a minimum level of engagements for the new figurehead in West Suffolk, whether a mayor or chairman, and a level of staff resourcing required to support them to achieve this. The review will therefore outline recommendations for the budget required to deliver the new role.

While the budgets will be considered as part of the review, the choice between a mayor and a chairman is not likely to be a purely financial one because doing the figurehead role will require an investment to undertake their role.

## **What is the difference between the civic leader and the Leader of the Council?**

The civic leader presides over all council meetings and also represents the district at social, charitable and civic functions. They can't make decisions about councils business. The Leader of the Council chairs the Cabinet meetings and has responsibility to take decisions on matters relating to overall policy and strategy.

## **What is the difference between the Mayor of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough and the Mayor of St Edmundsbury?**

St Edmundsbury has a ceremonial mayor – who has been elected by the council. They chair council meetings but cannot make decisions about council business, they also represent the borough at official events. Cambridgeshire and Peterborough has an elected mayor – they have been elected by the public as the head of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority and have the power to make decisions on policy and strategy for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough.

## **Can we have an elected Mayor of West Suffolk?**

You can submit a petition to the council requesting a referendum on whether local people should elect a mayor to lead the council and the community it serves. A referendum gives voters in the area a chance to choose if they are happy with a constitutional change. In order to call a referendum for a directly elected mayor a petition must be compiled and signed by 5% of the local government electors in the area.

## **What is the government's position on whether we should have a mayor or chairman?**

The government have issued legislation that enables either the shadow council, or the future West Suffolk Council, to decide whether it wants to be a borough council or a district council. We cannot more formally give the view that they consider this a local matter as they haven't formally stated that themselves yet)

## **What is 'freedom of the borough'?**

Freedom of the Borough is a mark of distinction given to a person and is the highest honour which a borough council can bestow. The freedom carries no privilege but is a recognition of significant and valuable services to the borough.

The awarding of the Freedom of the Borough to service units entitles the unit 'to march through the streets of the borough with bayonets fixed, drums beating and Colours flying'.

District councils can also award Freedom of the District. At present, Forest Heath has not awarded any such freedoms.

## **Will the existing 'freedom of the borough' be preserved?**

The West Suffolk Shadow Authority is liaising with the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government so that any honorary statuses, including the title of 'freeman' or 'freewoman' is transferred to the new West Suffolk Council.

## **What is a borough charter?**

The Local Government Act 1972 provides Her Majesty in Council with the power to confer borough status on petitioning district councils through the grant of a borough charter. The conferring of borough status is purely honorific, and the council remains a district council in legal, financial and all other senses.

If borough status is granted then the district council becomes a borough council and as a result the district council Chairman and Deputy Chairman may style themselves as Mayor and Deputy Mayor. The change in status has no impact on the functions or responsibilities of the local authority.

## **What happens to St Edmundsbury's Borough Charter?**

The new West Suffolk Council will legally be a district council. However, the new council will have the option of applying for a borough charter, to be a borough council. The charter would cover the whole of the area of the new council – that is, the area previously covered by Forest Heath District Council and St Edmundsbury Borough Council.

## **Why can't St Edmundsbury's Borough Charter be transferred to the West Suffolk Council?**

The law does not allow for the borough charter just to be transferred. This was the same in 1974 when St Edmundsbury Borough Council was created and the charter was applied for.

## **How can the council apply for borough status?**

The West Suffolk Shadow Council (before 1 April 2019) or West Suffolk Council (after 1 April 2019) must resolve by not less than a two-thirds majority of those members voting in favour of a petition at a meeting of the council convened for the purpose before one can be presented.

## **Can a town or parish council apply for a borough charter?**

A borough charter can only be granted to local government districts in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, not to town or parish councils.

## **Who is leading the civic leadership review?**

The West Suffolk Shadow Authority has established a working group of councillors to carry out the review of civic leadership within West Suffolk, supported by officers.

## **When will the review be completed?**

The activities of the Civic Leadership Working Group will be reported to the West Suffolk Shadow Authority, who should make all decisions there on.

It is anticipated that the work of the Civic Leadership Working Group would be available for the shadow council to consider by the autumn of 2018.

## **What will the Civic Leadership Working Group look at?**

The working group will advise the council on the priorities for its future civic leadership, and evaluate how the council should reward and recognise the outstanding contributions that individuals and organisations make to civic life within West Suffolk, with a specific focus on the following:

- To determine how the civic leader will collaboratively work with local members, establishing those areas of activity and the role local members will play to complement the civic leader's role.

- To determine the role of civic leadership then assessing the objectives in the Single Council business plan, and how civic leadership should support the aims and ambitions of West Suffolk Council.
- To identify how the civic leadership should operate in conjunction with other civic leaders and dignitaries across West Suffolk, including the High Sheriff and Lord Lieutenant, and mayors and chairmen of parish and town councils.
- To establish and identify the priorities for the civic leader's commitments, identifying where the civic leadership offers greatest value representing West Suffolk – for example supporting businesses, supporting community events, supporting arts and cultural events, charity fundraising, campaign work, promoting local democracy.
- To advise West Suffolk Council on how it might most effectively recognise the contributions of local citizens, groups and businesses.
- Advise West Suffolk Shadow Council on whether, given the role and function of the civic leadership, and the relative arguments, the council should have a mayor, which would require the council to apply for borough status.

## **How will the Civic Leadership Working Group complete their review?**

The following work will be undertaken by the Civic Leadership Working Group:

- Reviewing the current position in Forest Heath and St Edmundsbury, considering the similarities and differences between both ways of working.
- Reviewing the role of ward members in terms of supporting local events, considering their current position and how this could be developed in the future.
- Review of all events attended in both councils and by whom over the last two years.
- Interviewing of councillors (consideration will be given to one-one meetings and focus groups as applicable).
- Public engagement to include, schools, businesses, community groups, councillors and dignitaries, town and parish councils and an online survey.
- Review of national/international approaches to civic leadership (as relevant).

## **How can I take part in the review?**

The Civic Leadership Working Group is undertaking an engagement exercise during July and August. This will include an open public survey, focus groups with key stakeholders and interest groups and interviews with past mayors and chairmen and other civic figures in West Suffolk. You can [complete the survey online to have your say](#), email the Civic Leadership Working Group at [civic.review@westsuffolk.gov.uk](mailto:civic.review@westsuffolk.gov.uk) or write to them at Civic Review, Democratic Services, West Suffolk House, Western Way, Bury St Edmunds, IP33 2PA. Hard copies of the survey and engagement materials will be made available on request.