

Suffolk Business Board: Meeting 18 September 2025

Minutes & Actions

Business Board Members

Name	Role & Organisation
Oliver Paul	Business Board Acting Chair & Director, Suffolk Food Hall
Cllr Matthew Hicks	Leader, Suffolk County Council, and Business Board Vice-Chair
Paul Ager	Divisional Port Manager, ABP
Tom Ball	CFO, Ipswich Town FC
Kelly Boosey	Commercial Manager, Oxford Innovation
Peter Brady	CEO, Orbital Group
John Dugmore	CEO, Suffolk Chamber of Commerce
Doug Field	Founder, Beacon Advantage
Marek Hornak	UoS Pro Vice-Chancellor - Commercial and Academic Partnerships
Cllr Neil MacDonald	Leader, Ipswich Borough Council
Lisa Perkins	Chair, Tech East
Cllr Richard Smith MVO	Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Economic Development and Skills, Suffolk County Council
Cllr Caroline Topping	Leader, East Suffolk District Council

Apologies

Name	Role & Organisation
Mark Pendlington	Chair
Hannah Bloom	Chief Executive, Suffolk Community Foundation
Alan Pease	Principal and Chief Executive Officer, Suffolk New College
Leanne Gittins	Managing Director, LME Recruitment

Guests

Name	Role & Organisation
Paul Hamilton	Co-Founder and CEO, Halo

Officer team

Name	Role & Organisation
Andrew Cook	Executive Director Growth, Highways and Infrastructure, Suffolk County Council
Julian Munson	Head of Enterprise and Innovation, Suffolk County Council
Lisa Roberts	Head of Strategy and Operations, Suffolk County Council
Rob Hancock	Assistant Director, Suffolk County Council

Sophie Ward	Executive Assistant and Project Support, Suffolk County Council
Cleo Chalk	Communications and Engagement Executive, Suffolk County Council

Agenda

Item	Time	Topic	Lead	Paper / Verbal
1.	14:00	Agenda, apologies, conflicts of interest and last meeting minutes	Oliver Paul	Verbal
2.	14.05 -14.25	Halo briefing	Paul Hamilton	Verbal
3.	14:25 – 14:35	National AI Awards & Suffolk AI Festival	Peter Brady and Julian Munson	Paper
4.	14:35 – 15:00	Comms and Marketing Update	Kelly Boosey, Cleo Chalk	Paper
5.	15:00 – 15:30	Investment and intervention update, including Adastral Park/Innovation Martlesham & Business Support Platform	Julian Munson	Paper
6.	15.30 - 15.40	Devolution update	Matthew Hicks & Andrew Cook	Verbal
7.	15:40 – 15:45	Interventions written update, exception only	Lisa Roberts	Paper
8.	15:45 - 16:00	AOB and Forward Plan	Oliver, Rob Hancock	Verbal

Actions	
ACTION 1.1:	RH to reach out to by Miatta Rambula's office to arrange introduction to Business Board Chair following the cancelled meeting with Alex Norris. Rob Hancock
ACTION 1.2:	Board Members are encouraged to reach out to CC to participate in the Talking Heads initiative. Business Board Members
ACTION 3.1:	JM to provide Board members with a list of Suffolk Businesses who will be attending the National AI Awards. Julian Munson
ACTION 4.1:	Board members are encouraged to share the newsletter with their networks and participate in content opportunities (e.g., Talking Heads videos). Business Board Members
ACTION 4.2:	Board members to provide input for stakeholder mapping by suggesting key businesses or contacts for engagement, once initial draft is shared by Officer team. Business Board Members
ACTION 4.3:	Cleo will look to conduct one-to-one meetings with board members to gather information and improve two-way communication. Cleo Chalk
ACTION 8.1	Regarding West Suffolk Business Festival, RH to circulate details and seek a Board representative for the panel on the future business landscape. Rob Hancock

Decisions	
DECISION 1.1:	Decision was made to close JM's action from the previous meeting regarding a follow up with Kevin Keable regarding engagement with GB Energy. JM confirmed that GB energy has been invited to come to the area within the next few months.
DECISION 2.1:	Agreement for further discussions between Halo and the regional digital technologies cluster to explore collaboration and Halo's role as a central figure in the initiative.
DECISION 4.1:	OP asked Board members if they were comfortable with the idea of updates also going out to previous Board members i.e. Nikos Savvas. Board members supported and encouraged this idea and it was noted that commenting, sharing and liking will improve algorithms for the Suffolk Economy brand.
DECISION 5.1:	Agreement to move forward with the external procurement process for Innovation Martlesham management, using a tapered public funding model aiming for self-sustainability by year four.
DECISION 5.2:	Officers, not the Board, will handle the procurement process for Innovation Martlesham to avoid conflicts of interest.
DECISION 5.3:	Agreement to proceed with the business support platform pilot project as outlined, using DBT funding and aiming for a quick rollout.

	Item Description, Notes of Discussion and Actions Agreed	Action Lead
1	<p>Agenda, apologies, conflicts of interest and last meeting minutes – Oliver Paul</p> <p>Welcome and Introductions:</p> <p>OP introduced the meeting started the meeting by acknowledging recent highlights by Board Members and officers.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acknowledgement of Contributions: OP highlighted the ongoing work on individual projects, mentioning the scrutiny from JD and DF and thanking them for their contributions since the last meeting. OP mentioned that LG recently met with Jess Asato MP to build on the relationship. OP and JM recently met with Jenny Riddell-Carpenter to strengthen connections with central government. • Freeport East Relationship: OP mentioned the importance of maintaining and improving the relationship with Freeport East. Mark is working on ensuring Essex Business Board has clear representation with Freeport East. • Suffolk Ambassadors Network: KB represented the board at the Suffolk Ambassadors Network. OP highlighted the secure environment and the upcoming AI awards event in London. 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Voluntary Sector Skills Development: OP discussed the applicability of developing skills and understanding how clusters and bodies work together to the voluntary sector. A meeting with 30 charities has been held to support this initiative. • Ministerial Relationships: OP noted the importance of building ministerial relationships, despite changes in appointments. Alex Norris was replaced by Miatta Fahnbulleh as the Minister for Local Growth. • Freeport East Director Interest: RS mentioned that the CEO of Freeport East expressed interest in becoming a Business Board member. • Mayoral Elections: OP congratulated CT on their candidacy for the mayoral elections and noted requirement for potential future conflict management. • Talking Heads Initiative: OP thanked DF and PB for their contributions to the talking heads initiative. These clips are seen as a key way to deliver messages from the business board, and more participants are encouraged to contribute. <p>Apologies: Apologies were noted from Mark Pendlington, Hannah Bloom, Alan Pease and Leanne Gittins.</p> <p>Conflicts of interest: Captured under Item 4.</p> <p>Minutes Approval:</p> <p>Minutes from the previous meeting were reviewed with a request of an update on the status of the drafted letter regarding the Orwell Bridge which would lay out a road map. It was confirmed by AC and MH that this is still ongoing nothing that the aim was to create a roadmap that could be presented to the public, showing that the problem is being addressed in a structured manner. It was acknowledged that there would be disagreements on the approach or solutions, but having a clear roadmap would help communicate the efforts being made to address the issue.</p> <p>DECISION 1.1: Decision was made to close JM's action from the previous meeting regarding a follow up with Kevin Keable regarding engagement with GB Energy. JM confirmed that GB energy has been invited to come to the area within the next few months.</p> <p>ACTION 1.1: RH to reach out to by Miatta Rambula's office to arrange introduction to Business Board Chair following the cancelled meeting with Alex Norris.</p> <p>ACTION 1.2: Board Members are encouraged to reach out to CC to participate in the Talking Heads initiative.</p>	<p>Rob Hancock</p> <p>Business Board Members</p>
2	<p>Halo Briefing – Paul Hamilton</p> <p>Paul Hamilton gave an overview of Halo, it's background and growth story, and future ambitions.</p>	

	<p>DECISION 2.1: Agreement for further discussions between Halo and the regional digital technologies cluster to explore collaboration and Halo's role as a central figure in the initiative.</p>	
3	<p>National AI Awards & Suffolk AI Festival – Peter Brady and Julian Munson</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> JM advised that the National AI Awards event is scheduled for 16th October, with the Board sponsoring two tables under the Suffolk Economy brand. PB was acknowledged for his significant work in securing the event for the region, preventing it from moving elsewhere in the country. PB explained that the event is seen as a major opportunity to showcase Suffolk's innovation. PB noted that the AI Festival has been rescheduled to next year for logistical reasons and to align with the launch of the innovation centre, now planned for June There is an emphasis on advocacy for Suffolk businesses at the event, with plans to circulate a briefing note listing Suffolk companies involved. There was also an emphasis on ensuring a positive experience for visitors, targeted marketing, and leveraging the event to highlight the region's AI strengths and inspire the next generation. <p>ACTION 3.1: JM to provide Board members with a list of Suffolk Businesses who will be attending the National AI Awards.</p>	<p>Julian Munson</p>
4	<p>Comms and Marketing Update – Kelly Boosey and Cleo Chalk</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> CC has focused on strengthening foundational communications, including improving LinkedIn engagement (up 30%) and launching regular content such as Talking Heads videos, which have shown strong engagement rates. Media coverage has increased, with stories like the Ukrainian drone factory and West Suffolk College highlighted. The Suffolk Showcase is being prepared for key events in October and November, with new exhibition materials developed in partnership with agencies. The communication strategy and board engagement plan have been refreshed to clarify objectives and ensure regular updates on board activities and opportunities. A regular social media schedule is in place, with posts every Tuesday and Thursday, and a bi-monthly Suffolk Economy newsletter set for the last Tuesday of every other month. Stakeholder mapping is underway to identify key and emerging businesses for targeted engagement, with board input requested. 	

	<p>DECISION 4.1: OP asked Board members if they were comfortable with the idea of updates also going out to previous Board members i.e. Nikos Savvas. Board members supported and encouraged this idea and it was noted that commenting, sharing and liking will improve algorithms for the Suffolk Economy brand.</p> <p>ACTION 4.1: Board members are encouraged to share the newsletter with their networks and participate in content opportunities (e.g., Talking Heads videos).</p> <p>ACTION 4.2: Board members to provide input for stakeholder mapping by suggesting key businesses or contacts for engagement, once initial draft is shared by Officer team.</p> <p>ACTION 4.3: Cleo will look to conduct one-to-one meetings with board members to gather information and improve two-way communication.</p>	<p>Business Board Members</p> <p>Business Board Members</p> <p>Cleo Chalk</p>
5	<p>Investment and intervention update, including Adastral Park/Innovation Martlesham & Business Support – Julian Munson</p> <p>Before the start of this item, RH asked Board members if there were any conflicts of interests that needed to be declared.</p> <p>It was noted that there were potential future conflicts for Board members due to their organisations potentially being bidders for any future contract. This included John Dugmore, Lisa Perkins, Marek Hornak, Kelly Boosey, Peter Brady.</p> <p>In mitigation, it was agreed that this briefing would be placed in the public domain and an open procurement process would take place, and therefore that JM could proceed with the item.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Background & Proposal <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ JM discussed the decline in Adastral Park's innovation cluster membership. ○ Proposal to pivot from a BT-centric model to a Suffolk-led regional tech cluster, aiming to stabilise, grow, and sustain the cluster with independent management and governance. ○ The vision includes collaboration across regional/national networks, leveraging innovation assets, supporting start-ups/scale-ups, and enhancing commercialisation opportunities. • Comments & Questions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ KB raised a question about the cause of membership decline. ○ DF raised a concern about the usual approach to procurement, which involves going to tender and asking for costs. The discussion highlighted the need to understand what is required and then determine the cost, rather than the other way around. 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Discussion on whether the business club membership model is ambitious enough, with suggestions to expand beyond virtual offices and attract anchor tenants. ○ Comments emphasised the need for a rebrand to position the cluster as a national/international hub, not just a local initiative. ○ Suggestions to model the site after successful science parks and to ensure the cluster leverages BT's assets for regional benefit. <p>DECISION 5.1: Agreement to move forward with the external procurement process for Innovation Martlesham management, using a tapered public funding model aiming for self-sustainability by year four.</p> <p>DECISION 5.2: Officers, not the Board, will handle the procurement process for Innovation Martlesham to avoid conflicts of interest.</p> <p>Business Support Digital Platform</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The Board reviewed a proposal for a local business support platform/app to help businesses navigate fragmented support offerings, including local programs not covered by the national business.gov.uk site. The platform will use AI for diagnostics and referrals. ○ The pilot is funded with £30K from DBT, targeted for completion by year-end, with potential to scale regionally if successful. ○ Participants supported the initiative, stressing the need for simplicity, rapid delivery, and leveraging current technology. ○ The platform is seen as a way to improve coordination, visibility, and data collection on business needs and support effectiveness. ○ A potential conflict of interest was noted by PB, who has a company that develops this type of software. <p>DECISION 5.3: Agreement to proceed with the business support platform pilot project as outlined, using DBT funding and aiming for a quick rollout.</p>	
6	<p>Devolution update – Matthew Hicks and Andrew Cook</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Update Overview <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ AC reported that key components for progressing devolution have been received, including confirmation of the mayoral funding offer, capacity 	

	<p>funding for the current and next four years, and the new investment fund over a 30-year period.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The Police and Crime Commissioner and Fire and Rescue responsibilities for both counties will transfer to the new mayoral authority in April 2027. ○ The statutory instrument for the new Combined County Authority (CCA) is expected to come into force early next year, with a skeleton staff in place before the first mayoral election in May 2026. ○ The project is structured in three phases: establishment (now to mayor's arrival), growth (mayor's first year), and maturity (from April 2027, including blue light services). ○ Suffolk County Council and Norfolk County Council will each hold Full Council debates and Cabinet decisions in October to proceed, enabling government to finalise statutory instruments. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comments <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The update clarified the timeline and dependencies for devolution and local government reorganisation, including the parallel process of considering unitary authority proposals for Suffolk. ○ There was discussion about the uniqueness of running devolution and local government reorganisation (LGR) in parallel, and the government's consultation process. 9 • Questions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Clarification was sought on whether the two Suffolk proposals (one unitary vs. three unitary authorities) are complementary or competing. ○ CT raised a question about whether any authorities have delayed elections due to devolution or LGR, with Cumbria cited as an example. ○ There was discussion about how the Business Board should position itself in relation to the new mayoral authority and the upcoming consultation, including whether to make representations to government. It was confirmed by RH and LR that work is ongoing in the background with Norfolk and this topic will have a strong presence at the joint Board in November. 	
7	<p>Interventions written update, exception only – Lisa Roberts</p> <p>LR confirmed that the paper has been discussed with DF and JD, and the paper was provided in the meeting pack. LR asked the Board to raise any questions they may have.</p> <p>No questions were raised.</p>	

8	<p>AOB and Forward Plan – Oliver Paul and Rob Hancock</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OP reminded the group to note upcoming dates, including the West Suffolk Business Festival, and requested a board representative for a panel on the future business landscape. • OP mentioned ongoing discussions about New Anglia Capital and potential further investment, with a decision pending details from the British Business Bank expected at the end of October. • RH advised that due to the Suffolk Show, the 28th May 2026 Business Board meeting will likely move date and asked Board members to keep an eye on a revised invite. <p>ACTION 8:1 Regarding West Suffolk Business Festival, RH to circulate details and seek a Board representative for the panel on the future business landscape.</p>	<p>Rob Hancock</p>
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