

## Suffolk Business Board: Meeting 22 January 2026

### Minutes & Actions

#### Business Board Members

Name	Role & Organisation
Mark Pendlington	Chair
Cllr Matthew Hicks	Leader, Suffolk County Council, and Business Board Vice-Chair
Paul Ager	Divisional Port Manager, ABP
Tom Ball	CFO, Ipswich Town FC
Hannah Bloom	Chief Executive, Suffolk Community Foundation
Kelly Boosey	Commercial Manager, Oxford Innovation
Peter Brady	CEO, Orbital Group
John Dugmore	CEO, Suffolk Chamber of Commerce
Doug Field	Founder, Beacon Advantage
Leanne Gittins	Managing Director, LME Recruitment
Marek Hornak	UoS Pro Vice-Chancellor - Commercial and Academic Partnerships
Cllr Neil MacDonald	Leader, Ipswich Borough Council
Oliver Paul	Director, Suffolk Food Hall
Alan Pease	Principal and Chief Executive Officer, Suffolk New College
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
Cllr Matthew Hicks	Leader, Suffolk County Council, and Business Board Vice-Chair
Hannah Bloom	Chief Executive, Suffolk Community Foundation
Marek Hornak	UoS Pro Vice-Chancellor - Commercial and Academic Partnerships
Lisa Perkins	Chair, Tech East
Ian Gallin	Chief Executive, West Suffolk Council

#### 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
Michael Gray	Head of Skills, 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
Alice Tomkins	Economic Strategy and Inward Investment Manager, Suffolk County Council

## Agenda

Item	Time	Topic	Lead	Paper / Verbal
1.	14:00	Agenda, apologies, conflicts of interest and last meeting minutes	Mark Pendlington	Verbal
2.	14.20	Devolution update	Matthew Hicks / Andrew Cook	Verbal
3.	14:30	Business Support landscape - covering Growth Hub, High Growth, early-stage interventions, small business schemes, High Streets, Suffolk Economy Grants, New Anglia Capital	Julian Munson	Paper
4.	15:15	Inward Investment and UKREIF update	Rob Hancock / Alice Tomkins	Paper
5.	15:35	AOB and Forward Plan, including <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Nuclear East</li> <li>Social Value</li> <li>Business Board Changes</li> </ul>	Mark Pendlington / Rob Hancock	Verbal

Actions	
<b>ACTION 2.1:</b> Provide briefing note to the Board should further key updates arise from MH's meeting with the Minister. <b>Andrew Cook / Rob Hancock</b>	
<b>ACTION 3.1:</b> JM to engage a small number of Business Board members in business support grant scrutiny and Growth Hub oversight. <b>Julian Munson / Business Board Members</b>	
<b>ACTION 3.2:</b> JM to collect and present more detailed evaluation data on business support program outcomes, including job creation and return on investment, in the next Board pack. <b>Julian Munson</b>	
<b>ACTION 3.3:</b> JM to engage with District Councils to explore extending Norfolk's High Streets programme into Suffolk's market towns and leverage local funding. <b>Julian Munson</b>	
<b>ACTION 4.1</b> AT to provide statistics on UK investment secured through UKREiF activity in previous years. <b>Alice Tomkins</b>	
<b>ACTION 4.2:</b> Business Board members have until Friday 6 <sup>th</sup> February to make suggestions for potential speakers or panellists for UKREiF stand. <b>Business Board Members</b>	
<b>ACTION 5.1:</b> Business Board members have until Friday 6 <sup>th</sup> February to make nominations for new Board members or Chair. <b>Business Board Members</b>	
<b>ACTION 5.2:</b> Officers to provide update to the Board in early March with recommendations for Board appointments. <b>Rob Hancock</b>	

Decisions
<b>DECISION 5.1:</b> general agreement to proceed with developing the Nuclear East proposal and further update the Board in 2026.
<b>DECISION 5.2:</b> The Board expressed support for LG's approach to social value and agreed to assist as needed, with further updates to be brought back for consideration.
<b>DECISION 5.3:</b> The Board agreed to a letter to the Minister as regards Skills Boot Camps funding reduction, signed by Chairs of Suffolk and Norfolk Business Boards.

	Item Description, Notes of Discussion and Actions Agreed	Action Lead
1	<p><b>Agenda, apologies, conflicts of interest and last meeting minutes – Mark Pendlington</b></p> <p><b>Welcome and Introductions:</b> The meeting began with a review of the agenda and welcome to attendees in the room as well as Andrew Cook (AC) and Leanne Gittins (LG) joining virtually.</p> <p><b>Apologies:</b> Apologies were noted from Matthew Hicks, Hannah Bloom, Marek Hornak, and Lisa Perkins. Mark Pendlington (MP) asked if there were any other apologies, and it was confirmed that all others were present.</p> <p><b>Minutes Approval:</b> MP asked for approval of the minutes from 10<sup>th</sup> December meeting. Alan Pease (AP) raised that a correction was required to agenda item 2, reference to 'Suffolk Rural Felixstowe' be altered to 'Suffolk Rural'.</p>	
2	<p><b>Devolution update – Andrew Cook</b></p> <p><b>Summary:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>AC reported that in December government announced postponement of Mayoral elections from 2026 to 2028; this was unexpected and not requested by local authorities.</li> <li>Since then further negotiation has taken place. The interim mayoral investment fund offer was increased from 33% to 40% of the annual £37.4 million for Norfolk and Suffolk, with enhanced capacity funding for local authorities.</li> <li>The Combined Authority will have access to enhanced relationships and funding opportunities (e.g., Homes England for brownfield land) and direct government access until a Mayor is elected.</li> <li>Statutory instrument and legislative framework are not yet ready, limiting immediate progress; ongoing dialogue with government is required for further details.</li> <li>Unresolved issues include transfer of Fire Authority and Police &amp; Crime Commissioner responsibilities before a</li> </ul>	

	<p>Mayor is in place, and practical concerns about timelines and organisational setup.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>County and some District Council elections have been postponed by 12 months, impacting the devolution timeline; full implications are still being assessed.</li> <li>AC reiterated the commitment to devolution and mentioned that Cllr Matthew Hicks (MH) would meet with the Minister to discuss further, with any significant updates to be shared with the Board.</li> </ul> <p><b>Discussion:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cllr Caroline Topping (CT) asked for clarification on the enhanced mayoral investment fund, confirming it would be 40% of the annual amount for each of the two years before the mayor's arrival. AC confirmed this.</li> <li>Doug Field (DF) raised a question about the mechanics of splitting the investment fund between Norfolk and Suffolk, and how the combined authority would operate before a mayor is in place. AC explained that the inaugural Board would consist of representatives from both counties and would decide on investment priorities and operating costs, with the ability to drive economic growth before 2028.</li> <li>There was discussion about the impact of postponed District elections, particularly for authorities like Ipswich, and the legal limits of postponement. The need for cooperation between the shadow authority and the existing County Council was noted, though details remain unclear.</li> </ul> <p><b>ACTION 2.1:</b> If any material updates arise from MH's meeting with the Minister, AC/RH will circulate a note to the Board.</p>	<p><b>Andrew Cook / Rob Hancock</b></p>
	<p><b>Additional item on Ipswich Northern Route / Orwell Bridge – Andrew Cook</b></p> <p><b>Summary:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>AC reported on a follow-up meeting after the Suffolk Convention, involving National Highways, MPs, and other stakeholders, to discuss the resilience of the Orwell Bridge and A14. The focus was on identifying short, medium, and long-term interventions. AC stressed the importance of framing the issue as a national priority for UK logistics, not just a local Ipswich concern, to ensure government engagement and funding.</li> <li>AC noted some media disputes over meeting attendance and leadership but confirmed a recent letter to the MP for Ipswich seeking collaborative solutions.</li> </ul>	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Suffolk Chamber of Commerce is playing a key role in bringing stakeholders together and supporting the initiative.</li> <li>AC highlighted the need to ask DfT key questions with hopes that the MP for Ipswich will help facilitate these discussions and ensure National Highways are engaged, aiming to position resilience as a national infrastructure issue.</li> </ul> <p><b>Discussion:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Paul Ager (PA) mentioned there have been frequent disruptions since the new year, reinforcing the urgency and impact of the problem on daily operations.</li> <li>MP raises a query regarding the Transport East Board. It was confirmed the Transport East Board is involved and supportive, but AC cautioned about balancing this project with other regional priorities (e.g., Ely, Haughley, Copdock Interchange) to avoid undermining existing lobbying efforts.</li> <li>Oliver Paul (OP) and other participants acknowledged the complexity and slow progress ("wading through treacle") and stressed the importance of keeping stakeholders engaged.</li> </ul>	
3	<p><b>Business Support landscape - covering Growth Hub, High Growth, early-stage interventions, small business schemes, High Streets, Suffolk Economy Grants, New Anglia Capital – Julian Munson</b></p> <p><b>Summary:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The business support landscape is guided by the government's modern industrial strategy, emphasising business investment, innovation (frontier technologies like 5G, quantum, satellite), access to finance, and closing the skills gap. Suffolk's local economic strategy and action plan with Innovate UK align with these priorities.</li> <li>Suffolk's Growth Hub, operated by YTKO, provides workshops and 1:1 support on business planning, marketing, HR, finance, and skills. Funding for this contract (via UK Shared Prosperity Fund) ends in March, creating a risk of a "cliff edge" for Suffolk businesses.</li> <li>The Department for Business and Trade expects a single Growth Hub service for Norfolk and Suffolk from April, despite reduced funding. Suffolk will leverage Norfolk's team and expand as needed, with a future shift to the mayoral combined authority (MCA) when possible.</li> <li>A new AI-driven digital platform is being developed to help businesses navigate support options, set to launch in the summer. This aims to address complexity and improve access, complementing the national platform but tailored to Suffolk's local programs.</li> </ul>	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Suffolk's innovation support includes the North Star high-growth programme, the Suffolk Economy Grant Scheme, Anglia Capital Group's Angel network, and sector-specific initiatives (e.g., Future Tech, Innovation Grant Mentoring, Space East, Agritech Launchpad).</li> </ul> <p><b>Discussion:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Concerns were raised by MP, LG and DF about the complexity of the support system, the need for clearer impact measurement, and the importance of continuity in business support.</li> <li>Questions focused on the definition of "support," the effectiveness of programs, and the need for better evaluation and simplification. MP, LG and DF asked for more tangible outcomes, job creation data, and return on investment.</li> <li>Discussion highlighted the risk of fragmentation, the need for a single front door (Growth Hub) for all business support, and the importance of not reinventing the wheel but learning from past successes and failures.</li> <li>The value of human input versus digital/AI triage was debated, with recognition from Peter Brady (PB) that AI can streamline access but some support (e.g., grant applications, investment readiness) requires personal guidance.</li> <li>There was concern that Suffolk is behind Norfolk in startup support and needs a stronger focus on early-stage businesses, including localised incubator-style help.</li> <li>The Board stressed the need to identify which programmes demonstrate genuine impact, stop funding those that do not and concentrate on a simplified, high -impact set of interventions.</li> <li>Kelly Boosey (KB) raised concern that rebranding again (e.g., away from New Anglia) might confuse businesses and that branding should remain stable until devolution is resolved. Julian Munson (JM) confirmed that rebranding would likely be avoided.</li> <li>The need for better coordination with District Councils, especially for market town and high street support, was emphasised by CT.</li> <li>MP summarised that there is support for the recommendations but would like more clarity at the next meeting.</li> </ul> <p><b>ACTION 3.1:</b> JM to engage a small number of Business Board members in grant scrutiny and Growth Hub oversight.</p>	<p><b>Julian Munson / Business Board Members</b></p>
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	<p><b>ACTION 3.2:</b> JM to collect and present more detailed evaluation data on program outcomes, including job creation and return on investment, at the next meeting.</p> <p><b>ACTION 3.3:</b> JM to engage with District Councils to explore extending Norfolk's High Streets programme into Suffolk's market towns and leverage local funding.</p>	<p><b>Julian Munson</b></p> <p><b>Julian Munson</b></p>
4	<p><b>Inward Investment and UKREIF update – Alice Tomkins (AT)</b></p> <p><b>Summary:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• UKREiF is a major UK real estate and infrastructure investment forum held in Leeds, attended by regional authorities, developers, investors, and policymakers.</li> <li>• Norfolk and Suffolk will jointly host at a pavilion location to showcase regional strengths, promote investment opportunities, and communicate growth plans, especially in the context of the upcoming mayoral combined authority.</li> <li>• The pavilion is strategically located for high footfall and will host a series of events and networking sessions.</li> <li>• Last year, Norfolk and Suffolk engaged with over 400 attendees, collected 450 contacts, and identified 40 hot leads, resulting in follow-up conversations and at least one significant investment for Norfolk and several developer discussions for Suffolk, particularly along the A14 corridor.</li> <li>• The event is seen as a key opportunity for generating investment leads, with UKREiF being described as the main UK event for such engagement. 4</li> <li>• Planned sessions include infrastructure, cultural-led regeneration, town centre regeneration, digital and AI infrastructure, coastal communities, life sciences, and local growth plans.</li> <li>• The team is focused on securing high-profile, national speakers to attract a broader audience and maximise the pavilion's impact.</li> <li>• Cultural and coastal community sessions will address both opportunities (e.g., clean energy) and challenges (e.g., coastal erosion, resilience).</li> <li>• The importance of place-making and marketing is increasing at UKREiF, and these themes may be incorporated into the program.</li> </ul> <p><b>Discussion:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• KB emphasised the need for strategic session topics and high-profile speakers to draw national attention and investment, not just local stakeholders.</li> <li>• Suggestions were made to use attendee data for targeted outreach and to engage a marketing agency for messaging and event support.</li> </ul>	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>CT expressed that District Councils will have interest in being involved, particularly in market town regeneration and leveraging local funding for high street initiatives.</li> <li>DF raised a question about the measurable outcomes of UKREiiF, with requests for data on investment deals resulting from the event. AT confirmed that UKREiiF publishes such statistics.</li> <li>The need to identify and invite key investors and decision-makers in advance was highlighted by KB to ensure meaningful engagement.</li> <li>KB and AC noted the importance of not just networking with local colleagues but also attracting national and international investors.</li> </ul> <p><b>Report back on UKREiiF January event in London:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>OP and CT attended a recent UKREiiF event in London, designed as a warm-up to the main conference, focusing on the implications of the postponed Mayoral elections.</li> <li>The session included discussions on what happens during the interim period before the new mayor is elected, moving beyond complaints about the delay to practical considerations for ongoing economic development.</li> <li>CT spoke as a panellist, emphasising the need for stability in local plans to encourage private investment and highlighting the importance of addressing skills shortages through support for further education and workforce development.</li> </ul> <p>There was also an announcement that UKREiiF will have a stronger focus on marketing and place-making this year, with free entry for place marketing bodies, prompting consideration of whether to include these themes in the Norfolk and Suffolk program.</p> <p><b>ACTION 4.1</b> AT to provide statistics on UK investment secured because of UKREiiF activity.</p> <p><b>ACTION 4.2:</b> Board members are encouraged to suggest contacts and speakers to enhance the event's impact, with a two-week window for recommendations.</p>	<p><b>Alice Tomkins</b></p> <p><b>Business Board Members</b></p>
5	<p><b>AOB and Forward Plan – Mark Pendlington / Rob Hancock</b></p> <p><b>Nuclear East:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>JM and John Dugmore (JD) introduced the idea of establishing "Nuclear East," a regional partnership/cluster to represent and coordinate the nuclear sector in Norfolk, Suffolk, and Essex, including decommissioning, operations, and new build at Sizewell as well as future plans for small modular nuclear reactors.</li> </ul>	



- The region currently lacks a formal nuclear cluster, unlike other UK regions, which limits its voice in government and inward investment opportunities.
- The aim is to leverage the supply chain and maximise long-term economic benefits from nuclear projects, not to advocate for or against nuclear power itself.
- Initial funding is proposed from an underspend in the Generate partnership budget (Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex, and relevant districts/boroughs).
- Suffolk Chamber of Commerce would play a key role, building on their existing work with Sizewell C and supply chain development.
- JD emphasised that every other UK region with nuclear interests has a cluster group, and the absence of one in this region is a missed opportunity for influence and investment.
- The group would focus on leveraging the whole supply chain and sustainable energy opportunity, not just nuclear generation.
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- Discussion acknowledged that small modular reactors (SMRs) are a long-term prospect, but early engagement is important for future opportunities.

**DECISION 5.1:** general agreement to proceed with developing the proposal and to bring it back to the Board for further consideration.

**Social Value:**

- LG provided an update on social value and employee engagement, highlighting its growing importance in the local skills system, especially for work experience, apprenticeships, inclusive recruitment, and employer investment in training.
- Suffolk County Council is reviewing its internal approach to social value, aiming to simplify contractor requirements, strengthen monitoring, and improve reporting of benefits.
- A parallel strand is mapping good practice across voluntary, non-profit, and business groups to turn supply chain commitments into real opportunities for local people.
- LG emphasised the need to join up existing policies and practices, making it easier for SMEs to engage with public sector contracts and retain economic growth within Suffolk.

- Michael Gray (MG) highlighted good practice from the Mason Trust, which coordinates commitments from developers to support care leavers, showing that effective social value work is not always Council-led.
- The group discussed the importance of reviewing and improving current social value policies, with a focus on practical outcomes rather than rewriting existing frameworks.
- The timeline for the focus group and bringing recommendations to the Board was queried; LG confirmed a small, quick, and focused group is being convened, with Board input welcomed.

**DECISION 5.2:** The Board expressed support for LG's approach and agreed to assist as needed, with further updates to be brought back for consideration.

#### **Business Board Changes:**

- The Board discussed upcoming vacancies (two Board members and the Chair) and the process for filling them.
- Nominations have been received from current Board members, but the process will also include a targeted open call for applications via press release, website, and LinkedIn.
- Applications from both nominations and the open call will be longlisted, with interviews conducted by the chair, another Board member, and an SCC representative.
- The chair selection is a Board-only process (not open), with nominations, due diligence, and a Board vote, led by the Vice-Chair.
- The process allows for further nominations for two weeks before finalising the longlist.
- Discussion included the balance of Board representation across sectors, business sizes, and geography, with suggestions to consider observer status for broader engagement without overloading the Board.
- Culture was highlighted as a sector underrepresented on the Board, with suggestions to address this in the new appointments.

**ACTION 5.1:** Business Board members have until Friday 6<sup>th</sup> February to make nominations for new Board members or Chair.

**Business Board Members**

<p><b>ACTION 5.2:</b> Officers to provide update to the Board in early March with recommendations for appointments.</p> <p><b>Additional AOB:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MG reported a significant funding reduction for the Skills Boot Camps programme, with the grant dropping from £4.3 million to £1.275 million, resulting in a decrease from 1,200 to 405 participants for the next financial year.</li> <li>• MG explained the reduction is due to a change from a competitive to a uniform allocation method nationally, and Suffolk is particularly affected because of previous success in securing above-average funding.</li> <li>• MG requested the Board's support to write an evidence-based letter to DWP expressing disappointment and highlighting the impact of the cuts, suggesting it be a joint letter with Norfolk.</li> </ul> <p><b>DECISION 5.3:</b> The Board agreed to support the letter, with Mark offering to sign it, and to coordinate with Norfolk's Business Board.</p>	<p><b>Rob Hancock</b></p>
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