

Suffolk Business Board: Meeting 26 March 2026
Minutes & Actions
Business Board Members

Name	Role & Organisation
Mark Pendlington	Chair
Cllr Matthew Hicks	Leader, Suffolk County Council, and Business Board Vice-Chair
Hannah Bloom	Chief Executive, Suffolk Community Foundation
Kelly Boosey	Head of Commercial UK & Europe, SKC Games Studio
Peter Brady	CEO, Orbital Group
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
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
Paul Ager	Divisional Port Manager, ABP
Tom Ball	CFO, Ipswich Town FC
John Dugmore	CEO, Suffolk Chamber of Commerce
Alan Pease	Principal and Chief Executive Officer, Suffolk New College

Officer team

Name	Role & Organisation
Andrew Cook	Deputy Chief Executive and Executive Director Growth, Highways and Infrastructure, Suffolk County Council
Ian Gallin	Chief Executive, West Suffolk Council
Julian Munson	Head of Enterprise and Innovation, Suffolk County Council

Name	Role & Organisation
Lisa Roberts	Head of Strategy and Operations, 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

Agenda

Item	Time	Topic	Lead	Paper / Verbal
1.	14:00	Agenda, apologies, conflicts of interest and last meeting minutes	Mark Pendlington	Verbal
2.	14.10	Welcome to the Centre	Marek Hornak	Verbal
3.	14:15	VCSE Sector briefing	Hannah Bloom	Paper
4.	15:00	Norfolk & Suffolk joint Growth Manifesto	Lisa Roberts	Paper
5.	15.30	26/27 Forward Plan and AOB	Mark Pendlington / Rob Hancock	Paper
6.	16:00	Tour of Quantum Optics Discovery (QOD) Lab (Optional)	Darryl Newport	n/a

Actions

ACTION 3.1: The Business Board to raise the importance of the voluntary sector with the incoming County Council, once in place, to ensure continued recognition and support.

Business Board Members

ACTION 3.2: The Business Board, with Officer support, to develop a clear, consistent narrative that articulates the economic and preventative value of the voluntary sector for use in external engagement. **Business Board Members**

Decisions

DECISION 4.1: Delegated authority was agreed for the joint Suffolk–Norfolk working group to finalise and sign off the joint Growth Manifesto, incorporating feedback from both

Business Boards. It was noted that the refined document would be progressed ahead of the next joint meeting in April, with a view to launching at UKREiiF.

DECISION 5.1: The additional papers were noted by Board Members and it was agreed for the work in relation to these to continue, as set out.

DECISION 5.2: The proposed Chair and Board appointments were agreed by the Board, and will now be moved forward by the Officer team with inductions and briefings ahead of the 4th June Board meeting.

	Item Description, Notes of Discussion and Actions Agreed	Action Lead
1	<p>Agenda, apologies, conflicts of interest and last meeting minutes – Mark Pendlington</p> <p>Apologies: Apologies were noted from Tom Ball, Paul Ager, John Dugmore and Alan Pease.</p> <p>Conflicts of interest: Members were asked to declare any conflicts of interest or updates to the standing register. No additional conflicts were declared, and no amendments to the register were requested.</p> <p>Minutes Approval: The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed as a true and accurate record.</p> <p>It was noted that there had been a significant number of actions arising (11)), and it was agreed not to review them line by line. It was noted that actions were covered off as follows:</p> <p>Actions 2.1 and 5.3 relate to ministerial interactions and have been progressed.</p> <p>Actions 3.1, 3.2 and 3.3 are addressed by the Additional Papers for the March Board meeting.</p> <p>Actions 4.2, 5.1 and 5.2 have been covered by the recent papers regarding Business Board recruitment.</p> <p>Actions 4.1, 5.1, 5.2 have been carried over into ongoing project development.</p>	
2	<p>Welcome to the Centre - Marek Hornak, Darryl Newport, Stuart Catchpole</p>	

Summary:

- Marek Hornak (MH) welcomed the Board to the Digitech Centre and highlighted the University of Suffolk's longstanding and successful partnership with BT. MH outlined the importance of the Centre in supporting apprenticeships and master's courses, noting that the University is the number one provider for achievement rates among BT providers and ranks highly nationally. MH emphasised the value of the Quantum Optics Lab as a unique facility—one of the first of its kind in Europe—which enhances the University's regional profile, supports multiple economic clusters, and provides a tangible asset that can be showcased. MH encouraged the Suffolk Business Board to build momentum around this distinctive capability and use it as a platform for further collaboration and promotion.
- Darryl Newport (DN) introduced the newly opened Quantum Optics Discovery Laboratory at the Digitech Centre, explaining that it is now operational. DN outlined its purpose in testing laser-based communication systems and addressing future security challenges arising from quantum computing, which will increasingly undermine conventional encryption. The laboratory enables controlled testing of laser communications under a wide range of simulated weather conditions, before progressing to real-world demonstration through a transportable optical ground station that can communicate with satellite systems. DN highlighted the Centre's role at the forefront of quantum key distribution and secure communications, noting strong interest and collaboration from academic and industry partners including Cambridge, the University of Glasgow, BT, Honeywell and others. He emphasised the opportunity to attract partners to Suffolk by offering a unique, globally relevant but locally accessible facility.
- Stuart Catchpole (SC) from Space East positioned the Quantum Optics and ground station capability at the Digitech Centre as a nationally significant asset with the potential to place Suffolk and the East of England at the forefront of the UK space and advanced communications sector. He outlined how other UK regions are investing heavily in space, satellite testing, advanced communications and defence -related infrastructure, warning that the East of England risks falling behind without comparable action.
- SC set out a vision for Space Hub Adastral, using the Quantum Optics Laboratory as a core anchor, to attract

	<p>global businesses, support collaboration with the University of Suffolk, and build a strong skills and careers pipeline. The proposal would provide a single front door for industry and government, enable live testbeds and pilot programmes, and support the convergence of space, telecoms, quantum and digital technologies.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SC noted that a £5m investment would unlock this opportunity, catalysing regional growth, supporting spinouts, incubation and acceleration space, and strengthening the local space cluster. SC highlighted anticipated outcomes including high value job creation, stronger innovation capacity, diversified supply chains and alignment with national priorities in space, quantum, defence- and digital infrastructure. <p>Discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It was explained that while the next phase requires £5m, initial funding came via the Space Cluster Infrastructure Fund with matched investment, and a further funding round may be available. Additional funding is needed to unlock progress, including dedicated capacity to lead the programme. • Lisa Perkins (LP) emphasised the need to better position regional innovation within national priorities and use the cluster strategy to amplify existing strengths, improving visibility and access to future funding. 	
3	<p>VCSE Sector briefing - Hannah Bloom</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hannah Bloom (HB), Chief Executive of Suffolk Community Foundation, presented on the role of the voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise (VCFSE) sector in supporting inclusive economic growth in Suffolk. HB outlined key social challenges facing the county, including low school readiness, food insecurity, lower educational attainment, higher levels of depression, an ageing population and a shrinking labour force, emphasising the long-term implications for the future workforce and economy. • HB highlighted the scale and value of the sector, noting the presence of nearly 3,000 registered charities alongside community interest companies and thousands of informal groups. The sector employs a significant workforce, generates substantial income, and delivers an estimated gross value added of between £180m and £260m annually, alongside major economic value from volunteering. HB stressed the importance of prevention 	

activity undertaken by the sector in reducing demand on public services such as health, social care and policing.

- HB set out the significant pressures currently facing the sector, including reduced funding, rising demand and complexity of need, declining volunteer numbers and governance capacity, and the risk of organisational closures. HB warned that the loss of VCFSE provision can have immediate negative impacts on communities and public services.
- HB outlined opportunities for the Suffolk Business Board and businesses more broadly to support the sector in a more strategic and intentional way. These included local charitable giving, skills-based and pro bono support, volunteering, mentoring and coaching, work experience placements, digital and IT support, and collaboration through initiatives such as ProHelp and the Suffolk Infrastructure Fund. HB concluded by emphasising that a strong VCFSE sector is essential to sustainable economic growth and that supporting it is not only socially important but makes clear business and economic sense.

Discussion:

- Members expressed strong support for the presentation and agreed that the voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise (VCFSE) sector is critical to economic growth, particularly through its preventative role in reducing demand on public services and supporting workforce participation.
- Concerns were raised about the impact of local government reorganisation, with Cllr Matthew Hicks (Cllr MH) and others noting the scale of transition facing councils and the risk that support for the voluntary sector could be deprioritised. It was suggested that the Business Board should maintain focus on this agenda and engage proactively with the incoming County Council to ensure continued recognition and support.
- Cllr Caroline Topping (Cllr CT) highlighted the challenge of core funding, noting that while project funding is often available, charities struggle to meet essential running costs such as staffing and premises. Examples were shared of district-level approaches to supporting core costs, with agreement that good practice should be shared more widely across the county as structures change.
- HB reinforced that charities require flexible, multi-year and core funding to remain sustainable, noting ongoing work to encourage donors to move away from short-term,

	<p>restricted funding. HB also highlighted the immediate and visible consequences when VCFSE provision is lost.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lisa Perkins (LP) reflected on the need for a clear and compelling narrative from the Business Board that articulates the systemic economic impact of the voluntary sector, including links to skills, labour supply, talent retention and long-term resilience. LP suggested developing a concise “elevator pitch” that Board members could use consistently in external engagement. • Cllr Richard Smith (Cllr RS) emphasised the system-wide risk of voluntary sector failure, noting that insolvency within the sector leads directly to increased pressure on councils, health services, policing and housing. It was agreed that maintaining solvency across the whole system is essential. • Capacity challenges within the sector were highlighted, particularly around bidding for funding, commissioning and understanding true service costs, noting that many organisations lack the time or expertise to access available funding. Skills-based support in these areas was identified as a potential high-impact intervention. • A recurring theme was that businesses are often willing to help but want simple, immediate and practical calls to action. Members emphasised that support needs to be tangible and easy to understand, rather than reliant on long processes or future reports. • Overall, members agreed that the Business Board should play an active and ongoing role in advocating for the voluntary sector, particularly during a period of structural change, and in helping to convert goodwill from businesses into practical, effective support. <p>ACTION 3.1: The Business Board to raise the importance of the voluntary sector with the incoming County Council, once in place, to ensure continued recognition and support.</p> <p>ACTION 3.2: The Business Board to develop a clear, consistent narrative that articulates the economic and preventative value of the voluntary sector for use in external engagement.</p>	<p>Business Board Members</p> <p>Business Board Members</p>
4	<p>Norfolk & Suffolk Joint Growth Manifesto - Lisa Roberts</p> <p>Summary:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lisa Roberts (LR) presented an update on work to develop a joint Suffolk–Norfolk growth manifesto, following the first meeting of the joint working group. LR explained that the document is not a new strategy, but an outward-facing narrative that brings together shared strengths, 	

opportunities and challenges to present a coherent growth story across both areas.

- LR outlined that the manifesto focuses on where clusters converge, rather than individual sectors in isolation, and how these points of convergence drive future economic systems. The narrative is structured around powering, connecting, feeding and innovating the economy, alongside the role of foundational sectors. LR noted that the aim is to articulate a clear proposition that differentiates the area and supports future engagement with key audiences.
- Feedback from the joint working group was incorporated into the paper, and LR reported that the Norfolk Business Board had reviewed the document positively, agreeing with its overall direction. Key points raised by Norfolk included the importance of targeting private sector and investor audiences, given limited future central government funding, alongside stronger emphasis on place-making and the health sector.
- LR invited views on the intended audience for the manifesto and how it should be positioned and used, noting that it could support engagement with investors, businesses and future political leadership.
- Doug Field (DF) welcomed the progress made and confirmed that the joint working group discussion had been constructive. DF suggested that while the document works well as a shared prospectus or manifesto, it may need to be tailored for different audiences. DF proposed developing short, targeted versions or one-page summaries aligned to specific audiences such as investors, mayoral candidates or political leaders, with the main document acting as a central hub.
- DF also reflected that the manifesto would likely resonate with politicians and aspiring leaders, while a more explicit investment-focused prospectus would be needed for businesses and investors. DF supported refining the messaging through tailored framing rather than trying to make the document all things to all audiences.

Discussion:

- Cllr RS welcomed the document and reflected that similar place based- boards elsewhere in the county may not yet fully understand the role and ambitions of the Business Board. Cllr RS suggested there is an opportunity to improve communication and alignment with place boards, ensuring they are aware of and connected to the wider growth narrative being developed.
- MH supported the manifesto approach and highlighted the importance of the evidence base underpinning the

	<p>narrative. MH noted that this evidence is critical in influencing funders and investors and suggested that the manifesto could be adapted and repurposed to support engagement with different sectors and funding opportunities, rather than existing as a single standalone document.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lisa Perkins (LP) acknowledged the comments and reinforced that clarity of purpose and audience would be essential to the manifesto's effectiveness. LP noted that the document should act as a central narrative or hub, with tailored messaging or accompanying material developed for specific audiences such as investors, funders and political stakeholders. <p>DECISION 4.1: Delegated authority was agreed for the joint Suffolk–Norfolk working group to finalise and sign off the Manifesto, incorporating feedback from both Business Boards. It was noted that the refined document would be progressed ahead of the next joint meeting in April, with a view to launching at UKREiiF.</p>	
5	<p>26/27 Forward Plan and AOB - Mark Pendlington / Rob Hancock</p> <p>Forward Plan:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Forward Plan noted a longer gap before the next meeting on 4 June to allow for onboarding, elections and UKREiiF. June will focus on reviewing interventions and cluster priorities, with a joint Suffolk–Norfolk meeting proposed for late July on infrastructure. • Members discussed the revised UKREiiF approach following a necessary pivot from mayoral launch plans, confirming its continued value as an investment and growth event despite constraints. • Concerns were raised about purpose, governance and leadership attendance, with emphasis on early clarity and a pragmatic decision to proceed to maintain visibility and engagement. <p>Overview of additional papers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Paper A – Actions Update</u> Provided a response to actions arising from the previous meeting. This included further evidence and data on the return on investment of business support, building on points raised at the January session, and updates on ongoing work linked to previous actions. • <u>Paper B – Engagement Plan</u> Set out a proposed engagement and induction approach for the Business Board, particularly in light of forthcoming new Board members. The paper also outlined an 	

opportunity to refresh Board working arrangements and gather feedback from members on roles, responsibilities and effectiveness.

- Paper C – Communications Update
Provided an update on recent communications activity, including press and social media engagement. The paper highlighted positive coverage and examples of innovation and business activity being promoted through recent stories.

DECISION 5.1: The additional papers were noted by Board Members and it was agreed for the work in relation to these to continue as set out.

Chair Appointment and Board Membership Update:

- In advance of the Board, papers had been circulated setting out the proposed new Chair and Board appointments.
- The Board confirmed support for the new Chair appointment and Board appointments. An update on Board recruitment noted a strong field of high-quality candidates who would address key skills gaps, with appointments pending formal approval. It was noted that Paul Padda will complete his current Norfolk Business Board term before considering any future role.
- It was confirmed that all interviewees received feedback, with some personalised responses, and that unsuccessful candidates are being encouraged to stay involved through future ambassadorial roles and events.
- Kelly Boosey (KB) welcomed the new Board appointments, noting the added value of fresh perspectives, and confirmed that follow-up discussions have taken place to keep high-quality candidates engaged through alternative roles and opportunities.

DECISION 5.2: The proposed Chair and Board appointments were agreed by the Board, and will now be moved forward by the Officer team with inductions and briefings ahead of the 4th June Board meeting.

Chair's Thanks and Acknowledgements:

- MP recorded his sincere thanks to Oliver Paul for his significant contribution to the Business Board, particularly his representation at national events, ministerial engagement, attendance at UKREiiF, and wider advocacy for Suffolk's economic interests. MP also thanked Tom Ball, in his absence, for his support and contribution during his term on the Board.

- Mark expressed his appreciation to the Board as a whole for their commitment, constructive challenge and collaborative approach, noting the positive cross-party- working and shared focus on delivering for Suffolk. He gave particular thanks to Cllr Richard Smith for his long public service and support to the Board, and to Cllr Matthew Hicks for his leadership and engagement.
- Thanks were also extended to Cllr Caroline Topping and Cllr Neil MacDonald for their continued constructive involvement and contribution to discussions. MP noted that Alan Pease would shortly be giving way to Nikos Savvas as part of the rotation process.
- MP paid tribute to the Officer team, thanking them for their professionalism, expertise, patience and support.
- Finally, MP offered his congratulations to Andrew Cook on his forthcoming appointment, wishing him well in the role.

Vice Chair's Thanks and Acknowledgements:

- Cllr Matthew Hicks recorded his thanks to Mark Pendlington for his leadership of the Suffolk Business Board, highlighting the significant contribution Mark has made since the Board's inception. Cllr MH noted that Mark's reputation, credibility and commitment had been instrumental in establishing the Board strongly from the outset and in maintaining momentum during its formative period. Cllr MH thanked Mark for his dedication, advocacy for Suffolk, and the positive legacy he leaves for the Board as it moves into its next phase.