

## MID SUFFOLK DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of the **MID SUFFOLK CABINET** held as a Virtual Meeting on Tuesday, 9 June 2020 at 9:30am.

### PRESENT:

Councillor:	Suzie Morley (Chair) Gerard Brewster (Vice-Chair)	
Councillors:	David Burn Jessica Fleming John Whitehead	Julie Flatman Peter Gould
Councillor(s):	Rachel Eburne John Field Lavinia Hadingham Penny Otton Keith Welham	
Officers:	Chief Executive (AC) Monitoring Officer (EY) Assistant Director – Customer Services (SW) Assistant Director – Sustainable Communities (TB) Neighbourhood Planning Officer (PB) Governance Officer (CP)	

### 125 ORDER OF BUSINESS

The Leader of the Council welcomed Cabinet Members to the meeting and advised that the order of business would be amended and Item 2 Apologies for Absence, and Item 3 Declaration of Interests by Councillors would be taken first.

### 126 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Harry Richardson.

### 127 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS BY COUNCILLORS

There were no declarations of interest received.

### 128 MCA/19/59 DRINKSTONE NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

The Cabinet Member for Planning introduced the report which provided Cabinet Members with an update on the Drinkstone Neighbourhood Plan. The recommendations were moved by Councillor Burn and seconded by Councillor Brewster.

Counillor Burn advised Members that due to the Postponement of Elections and

Referendums Regulation which came into effect on 07 April 2020, the earliest date for this plan to go to referendum would be 06 May 2021. Government had provided further clarity through an update to Planning Practice Guidance which stated that 'where a local planning authority has issued a decision statement detailing its intention to send a Neighbourhood Plan to referendum, that plan can be given significant weight in decision making'.

Councillor Otton, the Ward Member for Drinkstone, commented on the amount of work which had been put into the plan and in particular the high level of environmental issues included.

In response to a request from Councillor Eburne, the Neighbourhood Planning Officer confirmed that the guidance referred to by Councillor Burn would be circulated to Members and the wider communities.

Councillor Otton asked if the referendum could potentially be held earlier should the government guidance change. The Neighbourhood Planning Officer confirmed should the regulations change the team would respond accordingly.

By a unanimous vote

**It was RESOLVED:-**

- 1.1 That Drinkstone Parish Council be requested to make the necessary modifications to their Neighbourhood Plan in accordance with the Examiner's recommendations.
- 1.2 That, subject to satisfactory completion of the above (to be agreed by the Corporate Manager for Strategic Planning), this Neighbourhood Plan be advanced to a local referendum covering the parish of Drinkstone.

**Reason for Decision:** To enable the Council to meet its statutory obligations under Section 17A of the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012 (as amended) and to allow the Drinkstone Neighbourhood Plan to proceed to a local referendum.

**129 MCA/19/60 TO CONFIRM THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 04 MAY 2020**

The minutes of the meeting held on 04 May 2020 were confirmed as a correct record.

**130 TO RECEIVE NOTIFICATION OF PETITIONS IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE COUNCIL'S PETITION SCHEME**

None received.

**131 QUESTIONS BY COUNCILLORS**

Councillor Eburne asked Councillor Fleming, Cabinet Member for Environment

*With regards to the overall performance of the Council, why are there still no performance measures in place relating to the Climate Emergency despite it being declared nearly a year ago in July 2019?*

Councillor Fleming Responded

*As all Councillors will be aware our Joint Task Force, that was formed in response to our Climate Emergency, has recently completed its work. This work included baselining of Council Climate data; and their detailed suite of recommendations will be considered by the Cabinets in early July. This will of course result in the adoption of relevant performance measures in order to manage our progress.*

Councillor Eburne asked the supplementary question why is there not a simple performance measure included in the report.

Councillor Fleming advised that a performance measure has not yet been agreed however it would be included in future reports as soon as possible.

Councillor Eburne to Councillor Burn, Cabinet Member for Planning

*With regards to planning performance, other than meeting national targets (GSP 01 and 02), what local targets does the Administration have in place to give the public confidence in the planning system for their communities?*

Councillor Burn responded

*The Development Management Service Plan set out objectives for 2019/20 and includes rolled forward objectives for 20/21. The service plan is accompanied by a series of transformation activities to lead the evolution of development management. <https://suffolknet.sharepoint.com/sites/connect/serviceplans/Planning%20for%20Growth/Service%20Plan%20DM%202019-20%20Interim%20Final%20Draft.pdf>.*

*Working with our Customers is described on p.15 of the plan (para 8.1 to 8.5) and this includes description of our work with part of our business community through our Client Side Panel.*

*Working with our Communities is described on p.17 of the plan (para 10.1 to 10.3). The service plan describes key performance measures for good customer service in relation to our pre-application advice service (p.20) and in relation to our communities (p.21) including making sure our communities have been made aware of development proposals and invited to comment, making those comments available online in good time and helping our Parish Councils understand the reasons for our decisions. The measures in the service plan cascade into and are tailored to individuals roles for the purposes of staff performance objectives.*

*The forward key performance measures for 2020/21 are detailed on p.22 -24. The objectives in the service plan are based on measurable outcomes which are*

*focused on ensuring we communicate effectively with our communities as represented by both Parishes, applicants and businesses. I consider that public confidence is promoted by effective communication recognising that local opinion about planning merits, which may well be antagonistic case by case, cannot be considered a reliable, objective, indicator of public confidence in the planning system.*

*Given the business interruption of Covid-19 we have not reviewed outcomes as yet but these will inform appraisals later in the year.*

*We have also prioritised our Parish survey around Covid-19 related circumstances and that was launched last week. This survey work does not pick up on the key performance measure related to Communities and we expect to undertake that separately later in the year.*

Councillor Eburne to Councillor Flatman, Cabinet Member for Housing

*With regards to claims for Housing Benefit and Universal Credit (TS01 and 02), what is the increase in number of new claims this year against last year and how does the Council's socio-economic policies impact the number of new claims? Given the sharp rise in rent arrears relating to those on Universal Credit, what is the forecast for this and what is being done to reduce it?*

Councillor Flatman responded

*From the start of the financial year 2019-20 until the end of Q4, we saw an increase in the percentage of the total arrears held by households in receipt of Universal Credit rise from 29.37% to 36.98%. This equates to a rise from £112,945 to £146,701. We anticipate that Q1 of 2020-21 will show a further rise.*

*We do not currently record the total number of UC claimants living in Council-owned accommodation, only the number that show arrears on their accounts. In Q1 2019/20 this number was 109, in Q3 it had risen to 136, and in June 2020 it had risen again to 173.*

*I'm not sure that the Council's socio-economic policies have had a significant impact on the number of claims, we are not quite sure which socio-economic policies you are referring to. Rather, it is the result of the on-going transition of benefit claimants from legacy benefits to Universal Credit, coupled with the impact of coronavirus and the associated lockdown which has affected job security and household incomes.*

*We have done some modelling on potential rent loss over the first few weeks and months of this financial year, but we should have a clearer idea of the direction of travel once the Q1 figures are completed in early July. The amount of arrears held by UC claimants will undoubtedly rise, given the number of new claims and the lead-in period for first payments. We were also affected by the DWP's decision to temporarily suspend third party deductions for a period during the lockdown. This affected 82 Mid Suffolk tenants and we estimated an increase in arrears of approximately £3,900 from this decision alone.*

*The new Income Management Policy has been in place for several months and the*

*initiatives contained within it, such as the Pre-Court Panels, have proved to be very effective in tackling higher arrears cases. Income Officers are also making contact with all new tenants to set up a positive, rent-paying culture from the start of a tenancy, and we are piloting new rent arrears letters this year to improve customer contact and repayment rates.*

*As a result of the coronavirus pandemic we did bring additional resources into the Income Team to help with the increasing numbers of tenants falling into arrears. However, as we are now moving into the 'recovery' stage, these extra staff members are no longer available. We are, therefore, actively reviewing workloads and considering how best to structure the team in the future to meet the new challenges.*

*As part of this work we will be trialling Rent Sense in August. This is software that analyses rent account and highlights those tenants most at risk of non-payment. The August test should provide an accurate calculation of what efficiencies we could derive from deploying RentSense, thereby allowing Income Officers the time necessary to focus on their more challenging cases.*

Councillor Eburne to Councillor Flatman, Cabinet Member for Housing

*Of the total Disabled Facilities Grants (PS04), less has been spent this year than last year in percentage terms. Why has the percentage of the total grant spent fallen and what is being done to improve this?*

Councillor Flatman responded

*In 2018/19, £263,553 was spent on DFG's, which then rose to £348,105 in 2019/20. This is a considerable improvement and although the percentage spend looks lower, the total available spend on the performance report includes the underspend from the previous year.*

*The actual amount we had to spend from the Government Grant in 2019/20, was £440,100. Therefore, based on the spend of £348,105, this equates to 79% spend.*

*As Members are aware, a new Regulatory Reform Order Policy was introduced in December 2019, which allows the Council to offer DFG's more flexibly. This includes increasing the threshold for non-means tested grants and the introduction of other grants such as support to facilitate a move to a more appropriate home.*

*The Home Improvement Agency contract is due to end in November, this year and Officers are working hard to develop a new model with Suffolk partners, which will ensure continuous improvement in the service and enable more DFG's to be granted.*

Councillor Welham to Councillor Burn, Cabinet Member for Planning

*In the four years, 2016/17 to 2019/20, eight Neighbourhood Plans have been adopted. Whilst it is difficult to set targets for NPs, SP03, SP04 and SP05 clearly show that more needs to be done to encourage and support parishes to prepare*

*NPs. Publication of the JLP may well prompt parishes with NPs to review their Plans and some may need significant revision. Staff presently in post have given excellent support supporting NP working groups but new incentives and additional support will be needed to assist the eight parishes to update their Plans and encourage and support many more through the process. What proposals do you have for providing more support to parishes which have NPs in need of review and working groups which may need extra support to complete their Plans, and how will you provide encouragement to parishes which, despite a desire to have a NP, have not yet started work on their Plans.*

Councillor Burn Responded

*Your question starts with an assumption that 'clearly more needs to be done to encourage' which is a wider debate than we can have now but I am happy to have a conversation about this outside the meeting.*

*On your substantive point, I'm pleased that you consider the support that the team have provided to groups so far has been excellent. I do too. Alongside our Neighbourhood Plans officer we also have colleagues within the Planning Policy team available to support and will be drawing colleagues from the Development Management service further into discussions with groups given their role in using neighbourhood plans to inform decision-taking. As well as this, it should also be noted that the team undertake internal consultation with a number of other teams across the Council when a neighbourhood plan group approaches us with a pre-regulation 14 plan.*

*Ultimately, if a Neighbourhood Group needs to undertake a review, which is an entirely normal part of creating and maintaining an up to date Neighbourhood Plan, it is their responsibility to do so and we will help guide them through the process. Essentially they need to review their evidence and emerging local and national policy, and we can guide them on the relevant stages they need go through and offer advice at the appropriate times as we currently do at the moment.*

*Encouragement for others to commence work on neighbourhood plans is likely to be most effective coming from those who have already undertaken a plan, so we will put measures in place to facilitate conversations between those who have a desire for a plan and those who already have one.*

Councillor Welham responded with a supplementary question and asked if there was a greater role which Ward Members could play in the creation of Neighbourhood Plans.

Councillor Burn agreed and stated that he believed this was something which many Ward Members were already taking part in.

**132 MATTERS REFERRED BY THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY OR JOINT AUDIT AND STANDARDS COMMITTEES**

There were no matters referred.

**133 FORTHCOMING DECISIONS LIST**

The Forthcoming Decision List was noted.

**134 MCA/19/61 QUARTER FOUR PERFORMANCE OUTCOME REPORTING**

The Leader of the Council introduced the report and thanked Cabinet Members for their continued hard work in conjunction with the Assistant Directors. Councillor Morley moved the recommendation in the report. Councillor Flatman seconded the recommendation.

In response to a query from Councillor Eburne, the Assistant Director for Customer Services confirmed that a new reporting format was being prepared and would hopefully be ready for 2020/2021 Quarter 1 Reporting.

Councillor Eburne raised a query regarding performance indicator HP05 relating to the housing register and asked if there was a reason for the fall in numbers from quarter 3 to quarter 4. Councillor Flatman confirmed that an answer would be provided outside of the meeting.

Councillor Fleming commented that performance indicator WS08 of Appendix G of the report was a new measure and a target would be included in the next report.

Councillor Field queried the performance measures relating to Building Services and asked if there were any particular reasons behind the performance levels. Councillor Morley confirmed that a response would be provided outside of the meeting.

By a unanimous vote

**It was RESOLVED:-**

That the performance report and the performance outcome information tabled at Appendices A – I of the report be agreed as reflecting Mid Suffolk District Council's performance for Jan – Mar 2020.

**Reason for Decision:** To provide assurance that the Council is meeting its performance objectives.

The business of the meeting was concluded at 10:38am.

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Chair (and date)