

MID SUFFOLK DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of the **MID SUFFOLK COUNCIL** held in the King Edmund Chamber, Endeavour House, 8 Russell Road, Ipswich on Thursday, 24 February 2022

PRESENT:

Councillor:	Paul Ekpenyong (Chairman)	
	Barry Humphreys MBE (Vice-Chair)	
Councillors:	Oliver Amorowson	Gerard Brewster
	David Burn	Terence Carter
	James Caston	Austin Davies
	Rachel Eburne	John Field
	Julie Flatman	Jessica Fleming
	Dr Helen Geake	Kathie Guthrie
	Lavinia Hadingham	Matthew Hicks
	Sarah Mansel	John Matthissen
	Andrew Mellen	Richard Meyer
	Suzie Morley	David Muller
	Mike Norris	Penny Otton
	Timothy Passmore	Dr Daniel Pratt
	Harry Richardson	Keith Scarff
	Andrew Stringer	Rowland Warboys
	Keith Welham	John Whitehead

In attendance:

Officers:	Chief Executive (AC)
	Strategic Director (KN)
	Assistant Director, Corporate Resources & Section 151 Officer (KS)
	Assistant Director, Housing (GF)
	Assistant Director, Communities (NM)
	Assistant Manager - Financial Accountant (RH)
	Corporate Manager – Governance and Civic Office (JR)

Apologies:

Peter Gould
Stephen Phillips

63 THE CHAIRMAN WELCOMED COUNCILLOR AUSTIN DAVIES TO THE COUNCIL CHAMBER AS THE NEWLY ELECTED WARD MEMBER FOR THURSTON.

63.1 In accordance with the delegated authority, the Monitoring Officer had granted dispensations to all Members in respect of the 2022/23 budget reports MC/21/26 and MC/21/27.

64 MC/21/24 TO CONFIRM THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 27 JANUARY 2022

64.1 Councillor Geake commented that paragraph 55.8 of the minutes was incorrect and should read that Councillor Geake drew Members attention to the Risk Management section of the Officer report rather than giving her own opinion.

It was RESOLVED:-

That subject to the revisions raised by Councillor Geake being made to the Minutes, the Minutes of the meeting held on 27 January 2022 be confirmed and signed as a true record.

65 LEADER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

65.1 The Leader of Mid Suffolk District Council made the following announcements:

65.2 As Leader of the Council, I would also like to begin by congratulating and welcoming our newly elected councillor for Thurston, Councillor Austin Davies. I had the pleasure of meeting and congratulating Austin at the count last Thursday and now formally welcome him to Mid Suffolk District Council and our Chamber.

65.3 Next, I would like to thank all of you, our staff and the wider emergency services, who rose to the challenge of the succession of storms last week. Fortunately, we were not as badly affected by those storms and related flooding as some other parts of the UK; but the impact was still felt by many of our residents. I was one of them, as were several other Councillors, having lost power for 24 hours and overnight into Saturday. Our teams helped fight the elements to ensure our residents were supported and kept safe.

65.4 This included our building services team who provided emergency cover, helping our tenants in need on Friday and over the weekend; and our public realm team, who created two rapid response teams, with officers out and about dealing with fallen trees. Thank you also to all of our officers that responded to our request to provide emergency support over the weekend. There were more volunteers than required, and your selflessness and flexibility is truly appreciated. Thank you.

65.5 This week of course we have had the Government's announcement about the lifting of remaining Covid restrictions. We already had a draft transition plan in place that is being reviewed in light of the Government's announcements. This plan means that all of our existing internal arrangements will remain in place for now but that we will be safely moving to more 'normal' working.

- 65.6 Councillors may also have seen that on Friday last week judgement was handed down in relation to Thurston Parish Council's judicial review of our planning committee's decision. Officers are currently reviewing the judgement and considering next steps; so there is nothing further I can add on this tonight but there will of course be further engagement with Planning Committee members shortly.
- 65.7 Sticking with the theme of planning, I know Councillors have been awaiting the outcome of the Planning Peer Review that took place before Christmas. The draft report from the Planning Advisory Service was unfortunately delayed due to covid related ill health. We have however now received the report which has been fact checked by officers. I am pleased that discussions of the recommendations and the development of a relevant action plan can therefore begin shortly.
- 65.8 As always Councillors will have directly received and seen the various press reports that have been published by the Council since we last met, all of which are also available on our website. I will therefore not spend time repeating them all here tonight; but as it is currently half term for our schools I did want to mention how proud I am of the activities we have on offer for our younger residents of Mid Suffolk this week, including football, swimming, crafts and outdoor cooking.
- 65.9 Similarly, I did also want to say how pleased and proud I am to see the opening of the new library in Needham Market and the nine new affordable homes in Botesdale. These nine affordable rent homes are made up of two and three-bedroom houses, a 2-bedroom bungalow and four one-bedroom flats; with air source heat pumps installed as the primary heating source in the houses and electric heating system in the apartments. We are literally building "great communities, with bright and healthy futures that everyone can be proud to call home" and I couldn't be more excited!
- 65.10 Finally, and sticking with the theme of exciting opportunities, you will all have seen that Suffolk was successfully named as one of the nine pathfinder County Deals in the Levelling Up Whitepaper. This success came following two delegations with Whitehall, led by Councillor Hicks as Leader of the County Council, and by me, as Chairman of Suffolk Public Sector Leaders. Unlike in other parts of our Country, we are and will continue to all work together, collectively between the district, borough and county councils to secure the best possible deal for the residents and communities of Suffolk. It is early days in these discussions with government but there is an ambitious timetable to agree deals by the end of the summer, and I will continue to keep you as engaged as I can in this process.
- 65.11 Councillor Mellen queried whether the potential award for costs relating to the judicial review of the planning committee's decision by Thurston Parish Council been included in the Council's risk register.
- 65.12 Councillor Morley confirmed that these costs were currently being considered.

66 TO RECEIVE NOTIFICATION OF PETITIONS IN ACCORDANCE WITH COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULES

66.1 None received.

67 QUESTIONS BY THE PUBLIC IN ACCORDANCE WITH COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULES

67.1 None received.

68 QUESTIONS BY COUNCILLORS IN ACCORDANCE WITH COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULES

Question 1 Councillor Mellen to Councillor Brewster, Cabinet Member for Economic Growth

When will the future use of the former Natwest Bank Building in Stowmarket be confirmed?

Response

The Council has agreed key terms with John Peel Centre for a new lease and each party's lawyers are working on final matters which are likely to be concluded within 4-6 weeks. Alongside the lease negotiations, the Council has previously agreed to fund repairs to the roof, and we have appointed a consultant to carry out a final assessment and prepare a tender specification for the work. It is likely the work will be tendered within the next 2-3 weeks and works will commence once a contractor is appointed.

Supplementary Question

Councillor Brewster was featured in the East Anglian Daily Times in March 2019 saying this vacant building at the heart of the town will enjoy a new lease of life and give local residents a new and exciting community space in the heart of town. My question is really why has it taken three years to get from that point to this point?

Response

There have been negotiations going on and the lease is the one thing that has held it up and will hold it up in the future. I think if two groups can work together things will speed along.

69 MC/21/25 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE REPORT

69.1 Councillor Welham introduced report MC/21/25 which updated Council on the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 13 January 2022 where the Draft General Fund 2022/23 and Four-Year Outlook, and Draft Housing Revenue Account and Four-Year Outlook were discussed along with the Call in of Cabinets decision on 6 December 2021 to approve a Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Vehicle Policy.

- 69.2 Councillor Scarff commented on recommendation 1.2 of the report and enquired when the meeting of the Constitution Working Group to review the terms of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Joint Audit and Standards Committee with the Monitoring Officer would take place.
- 69.3 The Corporate Manager – Governance and Civic Office advised that this would be raised with the Monitoring Officer.
- 69.4 Councillor Eburne asked whether the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had considered a budget process which would include community consultation in setting of the budget.
- 69.5 Councillor Welham confirmed that this would be taken into consideration for future scrutiny of the budget.
- 69.6 The report was noted.

70 RECOMMENDATIONS FROM CABINET / COMMITTEES

71 MC/21/26 GENERAL FUND BUDGET 2022/23 AND FOUR-YEAR OUTLOOK

- 71.1 Councillor Whitehead introduced report MC/21/26 and provided members with an overview of the budget and the four-year outlook, including the freeze on council tax charges.
- 71.2 Councillor Whitehead moved the recommendations in the report. This was seconded by Councillor Morley.
- 71.3 Councillor Field introduced the proposed amendment from the Green and Liberal Democrat Group relating to community transport, as detailed in the tabled papers.
- 71.4 Councillor Field proposed the amendment. This was seconded by Councillor Eburne.
- 71.5 Councillor Whitehead and Councillor Morley accepted the amendment.
- 71.6 Councillor Passmore raised the issues of possible future inflationary pressures as a result of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Councillor Whitehead provided reassurance that the budget included adequate provision.
- 71.7 In response to questions from Councillor Otton, Councillor Whitehead commented that he was confident that the budget would not need to be reconsidered following the recent events in Ukraine and explained the reasons for the increase in garden waste charges.
- 71.8 Councillor Matthissen commented on the delivery of services including planning enforcement, tree preservation orders, and the Joint Local Plan, and suggested that more resources be put into these public priorities.

- 71.9 Members debated the report on issues including: the high surplus figure and why this money had not been spent, the lack of a Council Tax break, the importance of delivering services, and staff vacancies.
- 71.10 Following a question from Councillor Richardson, the Chief Executive confirmed that the £5.1million surplus was planned to be spent by March 2023.
- 71.11 Members debated the report further on issues including: the importance of being in a strong financial position, the benefits of the freeze in council tax, and the proposed rural transport scheme.
- 71.12 Councillor Eburne commented that at the meeting of Mid Suffolk District Council held on 18 February 2021 it was agreed that the additional £4m of funding would be spent in the financial year ending 2022.
- 71.13 Members continued to debate the issues including: the delivery of services and the spending of allocated funds, and the difficulties in spending funds during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- 71.14 Following a question from Councillor Amorowson, the Chief Executive provided clarification of the mechanisms in place for ensuring that allocated funding is spent.
- 71.15 Councillor Morley spoke in support of the budget.
- 71.16 Councillor Whitehead in his summing up, paid tribute to Katherine Steel the Section 151 Officer for her work and dedication to the job and wished her a happy retirement. This was endorsed by all members of the Council.

In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 19.3, the vote was recorded as follows:

For	Against	Abstain
Oliver Amorowson		
Gerard Brewster		
David Burn		
Terence Carter		
James Caston		
Austin Davies		
Rachel Eburne		
Paul Ekpenyong		
John Field		
Julie Flatman		
Jessica Fleming		
Helen Geake		
Kathie Guthrie		
Lavinia Hadingham		
Matthew Hicks		

Barry Humphreys		
Sarah Mansel		
John Matthissen		
Andrew Mellen		
Richard Meyer		
Suzie Morley		
David Muller		
Mike Norris		
Penny Otton		
Tim Passmore		
Daniel Pratt		
Harry Richardson		
Keith Scarff		
Andrew Stringer		
Rowland Warboys		
Keith Welham		
John Whitehead		
Total 32	Total	Total

It was RESOLVED:

- 1.1 That the General Fund Budget proposals for 2022/23 and four-year outlook set out in report MC/21/26 be approved.**
- 1.2 That the General Fund Budget for 2022/23 is based on no increase to the Band D Council Tax.**
- 1.3 For scheduled rural community transport utilising zero carbon electric buses, set aside a budget of up to £560,000 capital and £130,000 revenue per year for a two-year period – equating to total £560,000 capital and £260,000 revenue from the Growth and Efficiency Fund.**

The meeting adjourned for fifteen minutes at 7.05pm

72 MC/21/27 HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT (HRA) 2022/23 BUDGET

- 72.1 Councillor Whitehead, the Cabinet Member for Finance, introduced the report and provided Members with details of the proposed budget including the reasons for the proposed 4.1% increase in housing rent.
- 72.2 The recommendations in the report were proposed by Councillor Whitehead and seconded by Councillor Hadingham.
- 72.3 Councillor Whitehead, and the Assistant Director for Corporate Resources, responded to a question from Councillor Matthissen, and confirmed that it would not be possible to transfer funds from the General Fund into the HRA.
- 72.4 In response to further questions from Members, the Assistant Director for Corporate Resources provided further clarification regarding the transfer of funding between the General Fund and HRA and confirmed that funding for

biodiversity improvements to HRA land could be funded from the General Fund.

- 72.5 Members debated the report on issues including: the need to improve fuel efficiency in housing, the fact that the proposed increases would disproportionately affect residents who can least afford them, the existing reduction in rent applicable to social housing residents through means testing and Right to Buy receipts and the possibility of entering into an agreement with the Secretary of State to keep all receipts.
- 72.6 Clarification was sought on how many residents would now qualify for benefits after the rent increase and what the equation was to balance this out.
- 72.7 Members also debated whether it would be possible to borrow money to invest in new energy efficient social housing.
- 72.8 Councillor Hadingham stated that the HRA fund was ringfenced. and it was necessary to increase rents to meet the Council's ambition to build new energy efficient stock and bring the existing housing stock up to EPC 'C' level and above.
- 72.9 Councillor Whitehead in his summing up said that he would not shirk away from making difficult decisions. Most councils across Suffolk had increased their rents by 4.1%. Between 45% and 60% of social housing residents received benefits. He detailed the average rents that were being paid and said that social housing was subsidised and well below market rent. The Council was planning to deliver 331 new social houses which would be of benefit to everyone.

In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 19.3, the vote was recorded as follows:

For	Against	Abstain
	Oliver Amorowson	
Gerard Brewster		
David Burn		
	Terence Carter	
James Caston		
	Austin Davies	
	Rachel Eburne	
Paul Ekpenyong		
Paul Ekpenyong – Chairs Casting Vote		
	John Field	
Julie Flatman		
Jessica Fleming		
	Helen Geake	
Kathie Guthrie		
Lavinia Hadingham		

Matthew Hicks		
Barry Humphreys		
	Sarah Mansel	
	John Matthissen	
	Andrew Mellen	
Richard Meyer		
Suzie Morley		
David Muller		
	Mike Norris	
	Penny Otton	
Tim Passmore		
	Daniel Pratt	
Harry Richardson		
	Keith Scarff	
	Andrew Stringer	
	Rowland Warboys	
	Keith Welham	
John Whitehead		
Total 17	Total 16	Total

On the Chairs casting vote,

It was RESOLVED:

- 1.1 That the HRA Budget proposals for 2022/23 set out in the report be endorsed for recommendation to Council on 21 February 2022.
- 1.2 That the CPI + 1% increase of 4.1% in Council House rents, equivalent to an average rent increase of £3.42 a week for social rents and £4.99 a week for affordable rents be implemented.
- 1.3 That garage rents are kept at the same level as 2021/22.
- 1.4 That Sheltered Housing service charges are kept at the same level as 2021/22.
- 1.5 That the Sheltered Housing utility charges increase of 50p per week for heating and 25p per week for water be implemented.
- 1.6 That the budgeted surplus of £95k be transferred to the Strategic Priorities reserve in 2022/23.
- 1.7 That in principle, Right to Buy (RTB) receipts should be retained to enable continued development and acquisition of new council dwellings.

MC/21/28 JOINT CAPITAL, INVESTMENT AND TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES 2022/23

- 73.1 Councillor Muller introduced the report and informed Council that under the CIPFA Treasury Management Code of Practice and the Prudential Code both published in 2021 and DLUHC Investment Guidance published in 2018, the Council was required to determine separate Capital, Investment and Treasury Management Strategy statements and prudential indicators annually before the start of each financial year.
- 73.2 Councillor Muller reported that there have been no significant changes in format this year and it had been updated to reflect the latest capital expenditure, investment and borrowing and the latest treasury management investment and borrowing positions of the Council.
- 73.3 Councillor Muller then detailed each appendix to the report before **MOVING** the recommendations in the report which Councillor Caston **SECONDED**.
- 73.4 Councillor Matthissen asked he if could see the previous budgets in the Capital Programme in Table 1 page 103 of the report as he was trying to establish the extent to which the Capital Programme had been affected following the Covid Pandemic.
- 73.5 In response, the Section 151 Officer advised that the purpose of this report was not to give an update of the performance of the Capital Programme. The performance of the Capital Programme was reported in the quarterly monitoring reports that went to Cabinet. The next quarterly monitoring report would be tabled at Cabinet in March.
- 73.6 Councillor Eburne referred to Appendix C Paragraph 5.18 which detailed how the Council was monitoring aspects of environment, governance and social issues and asked how that sat with the Council having declared a climate emergency but the Cabinet rejecting recommendations from the Joint Audit and Standards Committee?
- 73.7 In response Councillor Whitehead informed Council that Cabinet had debated the recommendations and agreed that they would adopt a holistic monitoring approach rather than focussing on particular elements.
- 73.8 Councillor Amorowson referred to the recommendations from the Joint Audit and Standards Committee to divest from fossil fuel investments and asked why the Council was still going ahead with this?
- 73.9 In response, Councillor Whitehead referred to the Minutes from the Cabinet meeting and reiterated that the Cabinet wanted to undertake a holistic approach rather than focusing on one area.
- 73.10 Councillors then debated investment trends for fossil fuels and renewable energy and future investments.

73.11 Councillor Muller in his summing up paid tribute to the Section 151 Officer and the support she had given him in his role of Chair of the Joint Audit and Standards Committee.

In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 19.3, the vote was recorded as follows:

For	Against	Abstain
	Oliver Amorowson	
Gerard Brewster		
David Burn		
	Terence Carter	
James Caston		
	Austin Davies	
	Rachel Eburne	
Paul Ekpenyong		
	John Field	
Julie Flatman		
Jessica Fleming		
		Helen Geake
Kathie Guthrie		
Lavinia Hadingham		
Matthew Hicks		
Barry Humphreys		
	Sarah Mansel	
	John Matthissen	
	Andrew Mellen	
Richard Meyer		
Suzie Morley		
David Muller		
	Mike Norris	
	Penny Otton	
Tim Passmore		
	Daniel Pratt	
Harry Richardson		
	Keith Scarff	
	Andrew Stringer	
	Rowland Warboys	
	Keith Welham	
John Whitehead		
Total 16	Total 15	Total 1

It was RESOLVED:-

1.1 That the Joint Capital Strategy for 2022/23, including the Prudential Indicators, as set out in Appendix A of the report be approved.

- 1.2 That the Joint Investment Strategy for 2022/23, as set out in Appendix B of the report be approved.
- 1.3 That the Joint Treasury Management Strategy for 2022/23, including the Joint Annual Investment Strategy as set out in Appendix C of the report be approved.
- 1.4 That the Joint Treasury Management Indicators as set out in Appendix D of the report be approved.
- 1.5 That the Joint Treasury Management Policy Statement as set out in Appendix G of the report be approved.
- 1.6 That the Joint Minimum Revenue Provision Statement as set out in Appendix H of the report be approved.
- 1.7 That the key factors and information relating to and affecting treasury management activities set out in Appendices E, F, and I be noted.

74 IRJAC/21/18 ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE APPOINTMENT OF EXTERNAL AUDITORS

- 74.1 Councillor Muller introduced the report and detailed the options available for appointing an external auditor for the Council.
- 74.2 Councillor Muller **MOVED** the recommendations in the report which Councillor Caston **SECONDED**.

It was RESOLVED:-

- 1.1 That the arrangements and options for appointing an external auditor to audit the Final Accounts of the Councils from 2023/24 be noted.
- 1.2 That the Council continue to 'opt-in' to the sector led body (Public Sector Audit Appointments Ltd (PSAA)) for the independent appointment of the Councils' external auditor, beginning with responsibilities for the financial year 2023/24.

75 COUNCILLOR APPOINTMENTS

- 75.1 Councillor Matthissen sought clarification as to whether the Poverty Board would be councillor or officer led.
- 75.2 In response Councillor Richardson stated that he thought the Poverty Board would be an officer led group but would clarify this outside of the meeting.

By unanimous consensus vote

It was RESOLVED:

That Councillors Davies and Eburne replace Councillors Amorowson and Warboys on the Joint Audit and Standards Committee.

The business of the meeting was concluded at 8:25 p.m.

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Chair