

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 Monday, 21 March 2022

PRESENT:

Councillor:	Paul Ekpenyong (Chairman)	
	Barry Humphreys MBE (Vice-Chair)	
Councillors:	Oliver Amorowson	Gerard Brewster
	David Burn	Terence Carter
	James Caston	Austin Davies
	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
	Mike Norris	Penny Otton
	Timothy Passmore	Stephen Phillips
	Dr Daniel Pratt	Harry Richardson
	Keith Scarff	Andrew Stringer
	Rowland Warboys	Keith Welham

In attendance:

Guest(s):	Steve Davies – Employer Services London Councils
Officers:	Chief Executive (AC)
	Strategic Director (KN)
	Monitoring Officer (EY)
	Corporate Manager – Governance & Civic Office (JR)
	Assistant Director – Corporate Resources (KS)
	Corporate Manager – Finance, Commissioning & Procurement (ME)
	Corporate Manager – Elections & Land Charges (EM)
	Head of HR & OD (SH)

Apologies:

Councillors:	Rachel Eburne
	Peter Gould
	David Muller
	John Whitehead

75 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS BY COUNCILLORS

75.1 There were no declarations of interests by Councillors.

76 MC/21/29 TO CONFIRM THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 24 FEBRUARY 2022

It was RESOLVED:-

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 24 February 2022 be confirmed and signed as a true record.

77 MC/21/30 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

77.1 The Chairman referred to paper MC/21/30 and made mention of his visit to the "Its Rocket Science" event. The Chairman informed Council that the building had been kitted out to a fantastic standard and would inspire children going into the space age.

78 LEADER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

78.1 The Chairman invited the Leader to make her announcements.

The Leader said that she would normally spend time as part of her announcements talking about the Council's various achievements and activities over the last month.

- Unfortunately there had been further bird flu outbreaks in our district;
- Residents were being supported to reduce their energy bills, which was so crucial given the rising cost of living;
- We have published our first climate change and bio-diversity annual report;
- We have used external funding to plant more trees;
- We have secured new external funding to provide specialised emergency accommodation for rough sleepers and those at risk of homelessness;
- And last week the Council underwent our Corporate Peer Challenge, we are looking forward to receiving the report and recommendations from it before we next meet.

The Leader wanted to focus not on what is happening in Mid Suffolk, but instead on the atrocities happening in Ukraine, and what actions the Council was taking as a result and the motion before Council tonight.

It was on the same day of the Council meeting last month that Russia began its invasion of the Ukraine. We all publicly expressed our support for the people of Ukraine at that meeting.

Since then, unfortunately the situation in Ukraine has clearly worsened and the people of Ukraine have been dragged into all-out war. We hope that peace can be reached as soon as possible, and that Ukraine can regain its independence and freedom. But Mid Suffolk cannot and will not sit quietly by – we will be vocal in our continued condemnation of President Putin and we will support our friends from Ukraine.

It is heart-warming to see how many people in this country have already signed up to help house and shelter those escaping the war. We do not have figures yet, but I am sure that many of the residents of Mid Suffolk have already offered to generously fling open their doors and spare rooms to support the refugees.

Much of the detail of this scheme, and more generally, is still to emerge from the Government. We will though be working together as the Suffolk family, across Mid Suffolk, the county council, other local authorities and wider public sector to make sure we wrap support around our residents and our Ukrainian friends.

I hope you will all join me later, when we debate the motion which is item 15b on the agenda, to send a clear and unanimous message to President Putin and to the people of Ukraine.

The Chairman thanked the Leader for her announcements.

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

79.1 The Corporate Manager Governance and Civic Office reported that a validated petition had been received regarding planning application DC/21/06825 – Land to the South of Suggenhall Farm, Church Lane, Rickinghall. The petition contained 102 validated signatures and 7 rejected signatures and would be dealt with through the planning process.

80 QUESTIONS BY THE PUBLIC IN ACCORDANCE WITH COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULES

80.1 None received.

81 QUESTIONS BY COUNCILLORS IN ACCORDANCE WITH COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULES

Question 1 Councillor Penny Otton to Councillor Whitehead, Cabinet Member for Finance

Whilst the government grant of £150 may go a very small way to offset the unprecedented rise in energy bills it will only be paid to those who pay council tax by direct debit. How many are not and could lose out?

Response Councillor Morley on behalf of Councillor Whitehead, Cabinet Member for Finance

Thank you for your question, Cllr Otton. I must advise you that the basic premise behind your question is incorrect. The Government will be providing the Council £5,199,300 in funding to support the payment of £150 to households in Council Tax bands A-D that meet the qualifying criteria. This includes not only households who pay their Council Tax by direct debit but also those households who do not.

Where the Council holds bank details on its Council Tax records, we can easily and automatically pay qualifying households the £150.

Paying the £150 to qualifying households who do not pay by direct debit is not as straightforward and a process to do this is being developed. The current estimate is that this is in the region of 8,500 households. Once this process is finalised, a letter will be issued to those households outlining the process that they will need to follow to obtain the grant. We have always encouraged all households to pay by direct debit and any household setting up a new direct debit before 1st April can, and will be included within the automatic process and therefore be in earlier receipt of this grant.

Alongside the main scheme the Government will also be providing the Council with £161,250 discretionary funding. The Council will be developing a discretionary policy for the administration of this limited funding to support vulnerable households who fall outside of the main scheme.

Question 2 Councillor Scarff to Councillor Brewster, Cabinet Member for Economic Growth

What steps if any, are M.S.D.C. taking on behalf of residents to express their disappointment of the news that H.S.B.C. are closing their Stowmarket Branch affecting users of the bank locally and wider than just Stowmarket?

Response Councillor Brewster, Cabinet Member for Economic Growth

The Council will be writing to HSBC to advise of its disappointment about the closure of this high street bank and to urge the bank to re consider this closure. As Stowmarket is the economic centre for many rural areas, it is important that we work with the banking sector to ensure provision is made for local customers.

Supplementary Question

Why the Council did not write to NatWest when it closed the branch in Stowmarket.

Councillor Brewster replied that it was a challenging situation having recently lost the NatWest, Santander and Barclays bank for 'commercial' reasons which will leave just TSB in Stowmarket and it is assumed that the excuse for HSBC's closure will be the same as those banks already closed and unfortunately this does nothing to support those wishing to use the bank in person, those who don't wish to use online banking for various reasons and those who are elderly or disabled and also those businesses in town. The question is what are the next steps we are taking, at this time I am able to confirm again that the letter is being sent and I have asked for it to be done in the strongest terms. Following which, if the bank takes no notice of that letter and given the pressure and accessibility problems of the post office in Stowmarket, I have asked that we should research another way in Stowmarket of serving banking for the public.

82 MC/21/31 NEW CODE OF CONDUCT FOR COUNCILLORS

- 82.1 The Monitoring Officer introduced paper MC/21/31 which recommended Council adopt the new LGA model code of conduct for Councillors.
- 82.2 Councillor Matthissen requested that everything possible be done to persuade Town and Parish Councils to adopt the LGA model code of conduct.
- 82.3 On the proposal of Councillor Morley and Seconded by Councillor Mellen,

It was RESOLVED:

That the Local Government Association Model Code of Conduct be adopted as the Local Code of Conduct for Councillors for Mid Suffolk District Council with effect from the Annual Council meeting in May 2022.

83 MC/21/32 COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEW

- 83.1 Councillor Morley introduced paper MC/21/32 and proposed the recommendations contained in the report.
- 83.2 Councillor Otton asked if SALC would be part of the consultation.
- 83.3 The Corporate Manager Electoral Services and Land Charges replied that all stakeholders would be consulted.
- 83.4 Councillor Mansel asked if only parishes who request to be included would be included.
- 83.5 The Corporate Manager Electoral Services and Land Charges confirmed that the review would include all towns and parishes.
- 83.6 On the proposal of Councillor Morley and Seconded by Councillor Matthissen,

It was RESOLVED:

- 1.1 **That a Community Governance Review be undertaken and the terms of reference at appendix A of the report be agreed.**
- 1.2 **That the Community Governance Review Working Group is tasked with conducting the review.**
- 1.3 **That the Community Governance Review Working Group be required to report its findings and recommendations to the full Council for decision.**

84 MC/21/33 DESIGNATION OF THE SECTION 151 OFFICER ROLE

84.1 The Chief Executive introduced paper MC/21/33.

84.2 Councillor Morley stated that she was part of the interview panel for the Assistant Director – Corporate Resources and Section 151 Officer and there had been two strong candidates but Melissa Evans' energy and passion for Mid Suffolk shone through and she looked forward to working with her.

84.3 On the proposal of Councillor Morley and seconded by Councillor Flatman,

It was RESOLVED:

That, having been appointed as the Assistant Director for Resources, Melissa Evans be designated to the statutory role of 'Section 151 Officer' for Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils.

85 MC/21/34 PAY POLICY REPORT

85.1 The Chief Executive introduced paper MC/21/34 and summarised the recommendations contained within the report.

85.2 Councillor Matthissen asked for clarification of what was meant by 'modern job titles' in recommendation 3.3 in the report.

85.3 The Chief Executive clarified that job titles needed to reflect the job being done.

85.4 Councillor Mellen began the debate by stating that he did not feel qualified to assess what levels of pay senior officers should receive and given the information given it appeared that the Council's salary levels are behind neighbouring authorities which could explain the struggle to recruit to some senior roles and the review of all staff salaries across the organisation gave some level of comfort.

85.5 Councillor Richardson stated that the review was overdue and went some way to address some of the key organisational challenges including recruitment and retention.

85.6 Councillor Morley stated that in 2015 a good number of the Senior Leadership Team were interims who could be employed without Council approval and a lot of hard work had been done since then to replace interims with permanent staff. She felt that the Council needed to invest in their staff and pay them appropriately to keep them.

85.7 Councillor Field stated that interim staff were expensive and implied you do not value permanent staff and in his opinion there were 3 issues which affected recruitment - working environment, reputation and salaries and it did not feel like the environment and reputation were causing the problem so it must be salaries.

- 85.8 Councillor Welham stated that it was very important to recruit quality staff and he was pleased that the review of all staff salaries had been recommended but this needed to be carried out within the timescales stated.
- 85.9 Councillor Passmore stated there was a need to recognise productivity and a need to look at value for money but also a need to recruit and retain good staff.
- 85.10 Councillor Stringer stated that all local government were struggling to recruit so raising salaries may not solve all the recruitment problems.
- 85.11 On the proposal of Councillor Morley and seconded by Councillor Mellen,

It was RESOLVED:

- 1.1 That the salary for the Assistant Directors should be set at £78,000 to £90,000 with a scale of 5 points (£78,000, £81,000, £84,000, £87,000, and £90,000)
- 1.2 That the salary for the Strategic Director should be set at £100,000 to £120,000 with a scale of 5 points (£100,000, £105,000, £110,000, £115,000 and £120,000)
- 1.3 That the Head of Paid Service be asked to review again the job titles 'Assistant Director' and 'Strategic Director' to determine whether these should be amended to more modern titles that better reflect the nature of the roles, and in line with job titles adopted by other Councils for similar roles.
- 1.4 That, subject to approval of recommendations 3.1 and 3.2, it be noted that the Head of Paid Service will commission a review of pay across the whole workforce, as set out in paragraph 5.3; to be completed before 31 March 2023.
- 1.5 That it be noted, in line with paragraph 5.4, that the Head of Paid Service will commission a review of the pay progression policy for SLT during 2022.
- 1.6 That the Pay Policy Statement (Appendix C) be approved subject to any consequential amendments arising from the consideration of recommendations 3.1 to 3.3 being incorporated.
- 1.7 Although the Council's Pay Policy Statement is already reviewed on an annual basis it is recommended that SLT's pay scales be reviewed in detail at least every 4 years.

86 MC/21/35 DECISIONS TAKEN BY THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE UNDER DELEGATED POWERS IN ACCORDANCE WITH PART 2 OF THE CONSTITUTION

- 86.1 The Monitoring Officer introduced paper MC/21/35 and summarised the decisions taken by the Chief Executive under delegated powers.
- 86.2 The report was noted by Council.

87 COUNCILLOR APPOINTMENTS

87.1 There were no Councillor Appointments to be reported.

87.2 Councillor Davies left the meeting at 18.28

88 MOTIONS ON NOTICE

88a TO CONSIDER THE MOTION ON NOTICE RECEIVED FROM COUNCILLOR MORLEY

88a.1 Councillor Morley **MOVED** the motion which Councillor Mellen **SECONDED**.

88a.2 Councillors debated the advantages of virtual meetings such as environmental savings, travel cost savings, Councillors being able to join meetings while self-isolating with Covid and increased public engagement.

88a.3 The disadvantages were also discussed such as isolation and Councillors feeling that they should join meetings when feeling ill.

It was RESOLVED:

That the Council supports the petition launched by ADSO and LLG on 5 January with regard to remote and hybrid meetings. We agree to write to the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities calling on the Government to change the law to allow councils the flexibility to hold such meetings when they deem appropriate within agreed rules and procedures.

88b TO CONSIDER THE MOTION ON NOTICE RECEIVED FROM COUNCILLOR MORLEY

88b.1 Councillor Morley **MOVED** the motion which Councillor Flatman **SECONDED**.

88b.2 Councillors expressed their support for the motion, issues debated included ensuring residents offering rooms in their homes for Ukrainian refugees do not lose any council tax discounts, providing support for community aid efforts and the language in the motion not being strong enough.

It was RESOLVED:

That the Council:

a. Condemns the unprovoked Russian invasion of Ukraine and stands in solidarity with the people of Ukraine and their families and friends, including those local to Suffolk.

b. Stands ready to provide support to those affected by this war and will open our arms to people displaced and affected.

c. Will work with and support the efforts of our local communities to provide help and comfort to those in need.

88c TO CONSIDER THE MOTION ON NOTICE RECEIVED FROM COUNCILLOR STRINGER

88c.1 Councillor Stringer **MOVED** the motion and outlined the reasons for proposing it.

88c.2 Councillor Mellen **SECONDED** the motion.

88c.3 Councillors debated the advantages of neighbourhood plans and some of the reasons why some parishes were unable or unwilling to implement neighbourhood plans. It was also questioned if this motion was needed as many of the recommendations within it were already being done.

It was RESOLVED:

That the Council notes our continued support for Neighbourhood Plans as the expression of communities' intentions and aspirations for development.

As a key part of the development plan, Neighbourhood Plans help to guide planning decision-making, and so this Council will actively encourage and support communities in the process of developing and bringing forward their Neighbourhood Plans without delay.

In particular, working together with Parish Councils and community groups, this Council will actively promote and encourage the process of developing a Neighbourhood Plan in each core village (as identified in the emerging Joint Local Plan) as a priority, in line with the community's aspirations.

The Council will allocate resources as appropriate to meet these objectives, including proactively contacting all core villages that have not yet started the Neighbourhood Plan process.

88d TO CONSIDER THE MOTION ON NOTICE RECEIVED FROM COUNCILLOR EBURNE

88d.1 Councillor Mellen **MOVED** the motion which Councillor Field **SECONDED**.

88d.2 Councillor Morley informed the Council that at the last meeting of the Suffolk Public Sector Leaders meeting, the toolkit had been approved for use across the whole of Suffolk Councils and as Chair of this group, Councillor Morley had been authorised to sign off and distribute the Net Zero Carbon Toolkit document with a foreword which she read out to the council.

It was RESOLVED:

That the Net Zero Carbon Toolkit be adopted as technical guidance for developers and homeowners to help reduce the carbon footprint in new and existing buildings.

It is noted that the Toolkit was developed by Forest of Dean, West Oxfordshire and Cotswold District Councils in conjunction with the Local Government Association (LGA) and is available as an open resource for all councils in England.

The Council will promote the Net Zero Carbon Toolkit to applicants at all stages of the planning and building control application processes.

The business of the meeting was concluded at 8.03pm.

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Chair