

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 November 2022 at 5.30pm.

PRESENT:

Councillors: James Caston (Chairman)
Paul Ekpenyong (Vice-Chair)

Councillors:	David Burn	Terence Carter
	John Field	Julie Flatman
	Jessica Fleming	Dr Helen Geake
	Lavinia Hadingham	Matthew Hicks
	Barry Humphreys MBE	Sarah Mansel
	John Matthissen	Andrew Mellen
	Richard Meyer	Suzie Morley
	Dave 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)
Monitoring Officer (IA)
Corporate Manager – Governance and Civic Office (JR)
Assistant Manager – Governance and Team Leader (HH)

Apologies:

Oliver Amorowson
Gerard Brewster
Austin Davies
Rachel Eburne
Peter Gould
Kathie Guthrie

66 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS BY COUNCILLORS

66.1 There were no declarations of interests by Councillors.

67 MC/22/26 TO CONFIRM THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 27 OCTOBER 2022

It was **RESOLVED:-**

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 27 October 2022 be confirmed and signed as a true record.

68 MC/22/27 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

68.1 The Chair referred Councillors to paper MC/22/27 for noting.

69 LEADER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

69.1 Councillor Morley made the following announcements:-

The death of two-year-old Awaab Ishak after exposure to mould in his family's flat in Rochdale was a tragedy, and I am sure all members will join me in expressing our sympathies to his family.

This sad case has rightly put the standard of social housing in the spotlight. In the last week, housing secretary Michael Gove has written to all housing providers in England, including Babergh and Mid Suffolk Councils, calling for an urgent assessment of homes to provide reassurance over standards.

But we didn't wait for this Government letter in order to act, we had already begun initiating work to address this. Members will be aware we initiated a full diagnostic review of building services earlier in the year. This picked up the need to increase our input into resolving issues around mould and damp. We have acted on these recommendations.

This year, for example, we have trained more people to deliver damp and mould treatment and employed a Damp Specialist Surveyor. We are also recruiting another surveyor to increase capacity.

The wellbeing of our tenants has always been a priority and following this case I can promise members we will redouble our efforts to ensure the quality of all our homes so that such a tragedy can never happen here. I have spoken to our new Housing Director, Deborah Fenton, who has updated me on all the actions already taken this year to resolve any damp and mould issues, and further measures planned. We are also progressing well with our Stock Condition Survey and are developing and costing a retrofit programme. The housing directorate will also be developing a performance framework to be presented to Cabinets and the Tenant Board every quarter, helping both members and tenants hold us to account.

This work is just a part of what we are doing to ensure our homes are fit for the future.

Since our last full council meeting, an historic county deal for Suffolk has been announced by Chancellor Jeremy Hunt. This is the first county deal of its kind in the country, and if agreed, will deliver decades of significant additional investment into local priorities. It will give Suffolk greater decision-making powers around the likes of transport, infrastructure and skills.

As you know, Suffolk's public sector leaders – including from Mid Suffolk and Babergh – and MPs have been working collaboratively on this for some time. It has been a great example of Suffolk working together for the benefit of residents and businesses.

The chancellor said Suffolk would get a directly elected mayor. But I want to clarify that Suffolk is actually pursuing a model where the Leader of Suffolk County Council is directly elected by the people of Suffolk. It will not be an elected mayor, and the current leader/cabinet model will be retained. The proposed change would not add any new levels of bureaucracy nor create any new offices.

I will keep you informed about the county deal as it progresses.

Next week, Mid Suffolk District Council will publish our End of Term report. This report tells the story of our council's fantastic achievements in the last four years. It covers the full breadth of what we have done - from how we supported many thousands of residents and businesses during through the Covid-19 pandemic, to how we are now helping in the cost of living crisis.

But it is not just about how we have magnificently stepped up to the challenges we have faced. It is a celebration of the outstanding work done by the council in all areas - including planning and housing, driving economic growth, and delivering a vision for our district and its communities.

I would urge everyone to read it, reflect on our achievements and feel pride in what we do. Please do share it with people in your ward.

69.2 In response to a question from Councillor Welham regarding incidents of damp in council owned housing, Councillor Morley advised Members that a briefing paper was being prepared by the newly appointed Director for Housing and would be issued to Members shortly.

69.3 Councillor Geake asked whether the proposed damp treatment would centre on structural and heating issues to treat the root cause of the damp rather than chemical treatments.

69.4 In reply, Councillor Morley advised that research into the proposed works had not yet taken place, however when this work had been completed the outcome would be shared with Members.

69.5 Councillor Morley responded to a question from Councillor Field regarding the treatment of damp in sheltered accommodation, advising that as soon as details of the proposed treatment were available this would be shared with Members.

69.6 Councillor Otton requested assurance from the Cabinet Member for Housing that chemical treatments would not be used to treat the issues.

69.7 Councillor Morley restated that details would be shared as soon as they became available.

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

70.1 None Received.

QUESTIONS BY THE PUBLIC IN ACCORDANCE WITH COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULES

Question 1

Mr Pyle to Councillor Gould, Cabinet Member for Assets and Investments

Given that on the 9th November 2022 a development control committee refused permission for a single house in Elmswell because it was to be built on Public Open Space (POS), how is it possible that Mid Suffolk Cabinet continue to plan for 50 houses on 9 acres of POS on the other side of the village?

Response from Councillor Richardson, Cabinet Member for Economic Growth, on behalf of Councillor Gould, Cabinet Member for Assets and Investments

I am not party to the specifics of the case that you refer to, although I am reliably informed that the planning committee report concluded that insufficient information had been provided by the applicant in that case to determine whether the proposal accorded with the National Planning Policy Framework. As each planning case is considered on its own merits, I don't think it is appropriate to compare sites in this way particularly as the formal status of these sites differs within our emerging local plan.

As Members will be aware the Council is considering the delivery of an exemplar sustainable residential development in Elmswell of approximately 50 homes on a site which is within the Council's ownership at Church and School Road, though it is still in its early days in terms of shaping this proposal further. The first community engagement event took place last week which provided significant feedback for further consideration, and we are very grateful for the high level of attendance and engagement from the community within Elmswell and there will be further engagement in this regard and any scheme will in due course be considered by the planning authority and assessed accordingly.

Supplementary Question

Given the positive discussion with Elmswell Parish Council about the possibility of a new primary school on the site why has this option been dropped?

Response from Councillor Richardson

The question of the primary school has been discussed at Cabinet both early this month and last year as well, the issue being, and members will be aware of the difficulties associated with HRA ownership of land, but for simplicity the actual site itself is owned by the Housing Revenue Account which for legal reasons is a separate ringfenced entity from Mid Suffolk's otherwise General Fund. What this means in practice is that for any disposal of the land for purposes not for housing purposes we would need to prove that there is no way the land could facilitate housing, and there was no need for housing within a particular area. Now, given that Elmswell is designated as a core village within the emerging local plan, given that it's a highly sustainable village, given the amenities that are present, and that it's got excellent transport connections, we cannot prove either of those two criteria and the decision ultimately would have to go to the Secretary of State for approval provided we didn't meet either of those conditions and unfortunately in this particular instance we can't prove that and we don't think we will get the Secretary of State's approval for disposal of the land. So, whilst we have had extensive conversations with local

stakeholders the approach that we have taken, that's the advice that we as Cabinet have received from Officers is that this site is suitable for delivery of housing, there is a need for particularly affordable housing, within Elmswell and the local area, and for that reason Cabinets indication earlier this month was that we wish to proceed with housing at this site.

72 QUESTIONS BY COUNCILLORS IN ACCORDANCE WITH COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULES

Question 1

Councillor Mellen to Councillor Morley, Leader of the Council

Councillor Morley as leader of the Council has welcomed the announcement of a devolution deal for Suffolk with a directly elected council leader. What level of involvement will other councillors in this authority have in agreeing this change to Suffolk's governance?

Response from Councillor Morley, Leader of the Council

Any change to a directly elected Leader for Suffolk County Council is a Governance change for Suffolk County Council and Mid Suffolk District Council would not be involved in that.

Supplementary Question

Do you agree that there is a lack of clarity in the current information in the public domain about how this new role will work.

Response from Councillor Morley

Yes, I do.

73 COUNCILLOR APPOINTMENTS

73.1 There were no changes in placings.

74 MOTIONS ON NOTICE

75 TO CONSIDER THE MOTION ON NOTICE RECEIVED FROM COUNCILLOR MORLEY

44.1 Councillor Morley **PROPOSED** her motion which was a template that councillors and councils could use to publicly demonstrate their commitment to improving the quality of public and political debate and challenging abuse and intimidation of people in public life by signing up to the LGA Debate Not Hate campaign.

44.2 Councillor Mellen **SECONDED** the motion and expressed his support.

44.3 Members debated the motion, discussing the effect of social media, the role of good communication, the role the Communications team could play in factual correction of comments, the effect on Parish Councillors, and the importance of encouraging more diversity in the Council.

It was RESOLVED:

This council notes that increasing levels of toxicity in public and political discourse is having a detrimental impact of local democracy and that prevention, support and responses to abuse and intimidation of local politicians must improve to ensure councillors feel safe and able to continue representing their residents.

This councils therefore commits to challenge the normalisation of abuse against councillors and uphold exemplary standards of public and political debate in all it does. The council further agrees to sign up to the LGA's Debate Not Hate campaign. The campaign aims to raise public awareness of the role of councillors in local communities, encourage healthy debate and improve the response to and support for local politicians facing abuse and intimidation.

In addition, the council **RESOLVES** to:

- Write to the local Member of Parliament to ask them to support the campaign
- Write to the Government to ask them to work with the LGA to develop and implement a plan to address abuse and intimidation of politicians
- Regularly review the support available to councillors in relation to abuse and intimidation and councillor safety
- Work with the local police to ensure there is a clear and joined-up mechanism for reporting threats and other concerns about the safety of councillors and their families
- Take a zero-tolerance approach to abuse of councillors and officers.

76 TO CONSIDER THE MOTION ON NOTICE RECEIVED FROM COUNCILLOR MELLEEN

76.1 Councillor Mellen **PROPOSED** his Motion which sought to address some of the issues arising from the impact of regular wastewater discharges into local rivers and the effect of this on wildlife and human health, by resolving to publicly scrutinise the issues at a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, giving due consideration to the cumulative impact of sewage when making decisions regarding allocations in the Joint Local Plan, and requesting that Planning Officers include details on the impact on watercourses in all reports relating to major developments, or to identify where this information is not available.

76.2 Councillor Fleming **SECONDED** the motion, commenting that the motion recognised the concerns of the general public regarding water quality, and laid out how the Council address these concerns.

76.3 Members debated the motion on issues including: the impact of permeable surfaces on surface water drainage, the benefits of the proposed changes to the planning system.

76.4 Councillor Richardson proposed an amendment to the motion requesting that

in addition to any proposed changes to the planning system, the Council lobby local MPs and Ofwat to express concerns over water quality and the desire to see improvements.

- 76.5 The amendment was accepted by the Proposer and Seconder.
- 76.6 Members continued to debate the motion on issues including: the comments currently received from consultees regarding planning applications, the work undertaken by the Suffolk Drainage Board to raise awareness of the issues, the role the Overview and Scrutiny Committee could play, the negative effect on residents, the environments, ecosystems, and other factors leading to river pollution.

This Council RESOLVES to:

- 1. Ask the chair of the scrutiny committee to invite senior officers of Anglian Water plus senior representatives from the relevant internal Drainage Boards, Natural England and the Environment Agency to attend a meeting to answer questions on the current levels of untreated sewage discharges to waters in Mid Suffolk.**
- 2. Ensure that in gathering evidence for future iterations of the local plan the council consider the cumulative impact of sewage when deciding the overall level of housing and other development. The council notes that decisions about allocations in the Joint Local Plan will be guided by an updated Water Cycle Study. This should take into account the impact of combined sewer overflow discharges on watercourses and the capacity of waste water treatment works to process anticipated new foul drainage.**
- 3. Ask Anglian Water, from this date onwards, in its planning consultation responses for major development, to identify which treatment works will be managing the sewage and what their capacity is to treat additional volumes of effluent; whether it has the information available to assess the impact on the number or duration of sewage discharges into local rivers, and if it does have this information to share it (noting that this can only be requested not required).**
- 4. Request that planning officers, from now onwards, include in all reports relating to major development a specific section on the impact on watercourses, including the potential for the development to result in untreated sewage outflow into watercourses (i.e. cumulative impact), or to flag if this information is not fully available, so that this information (or the lack of it) is clearly and transparently set out.**
- 5. That the Council lobby local MPs and Ofwat to express concerns over water quality and the desire to see improvements.**

The business of the meeting was concluded at 7.05pm

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Chair