

MID SUFFOLK DISTRICT COUNCIL

TO: Council	REPORT NUMBER: MC/18/31
FROM: Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee	DATE OF MEETING: 19 December 2018

Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee

On 19 November, the committee considered reports on the following:

Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Expenditure Process

The committee heard from three witnesses: a village hall secretary who made a successful bid; a Babergh Member who assisted with a number of successful bids and a representative of Suffolk County Council who made a number of successful and unsuccessful bids. A general feeling emerged that the current application form is unnecessarily complicated, particularly for community bids for smaller projects. The timescale for making the bid is too short and the waiting time for hearing whether or not a bid has been successful causes difficulties; for example, the bid needs to be accompanied by three quotations of cost but they are likely to be out of date by the time the applicant hears back from MSDC. Could an element to cover cost inflation be included? MSDC retain a percentage for administering the process, yet Parish Councils, for instance, are expected to meet all their costs in administering the process. The cost of preparing designs and a planning application is significant in many cases and cannot be covered by the CIL bid.

Local Councils and community groups need to be made more aware of the CIL process and there needs to be a clearer definition of infrastructure to avoid bids being made for repair and maintenance. There should be more encouragement to Parish Councils to prepare Parish Infrastructure Improvement Plans which could then form the basis of CIL bids. District Councillors have a role in promoting CIL to community groups but are all members fully briefed? The committee felt that the bidding process needed to be extended; a bidding window of one month is considered insufficient.

Members of the committee were not persuaded that bus stop provision should come from CIL rather than the SCC budget. In respect of large school extensions, SCC are of the view that CIL should cover design and planning stages, not just the construction cost. Members queried why CIL should fund the whole cost of school extensions with no contribution from SCC funds. Furthermore, the process and application form are not considered appropriate for such major schemes.

Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 – Review of the first six months

Officers were congratulated on the detail in their report and for their work in dealing with a large increase in workload, which has more than doubled. Extra resources have been in place for a few months and staff are 'coping'. As funding from central government reduces, the future is unclear. The committee were assured that the Cabinet Member regularly reviews workload of the Team.

Homelessness Prevention Fund Policy

Members were asked to comment on a draft report for the Homelessness Prevention Fund Policy – historically a fund used to prevent someone becoming homeless. Again, officers were commended for the clarity of the report which explained why the current policy is out of date. Members agreed that the draft policy proposed within the report is acceptable.

Community Strategy Engagement Policy

Members considered an officer report setting out a suggested process for engagement to produce data and views to enable a draft strategy to be written. It was agreed that focussed discussions with various groups would be a suitable way forward but pointed out that care must be taken to ensure that the views of young people and hard to reach individuals and groups are sought and taken into account early in the process.

Mid Suffolk Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Also on 19 November, at a separate meeting, the Mid Suffolk Overview and Scrutiny Committee received a presentation on proposals for the development of the former HQ site and the Middle School site in Needham Market. Due to the confidential nature of the details contained within the officers' presentation, the public were excluded to allow a full discussion, at the end of which a recommendation was drafted for consideration at Cabinet on 10 December.

Keith Welham

Chair, Mid Suffolk Overview and Scrutiny Committee