

**Leaders Report**

1. **The LGA Building Council Homes Programme.** The removal of the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) cap offers councils an opportunity to build more homes, and the LGA want to support Councils to do so. Babergh and Mid Suffolk have been successful in their joint bid for funding under the LGA programme. The grant offered a maximum of £50k to help promote, facilitate and enhance the role and capacity of councils to meet local housing need. The two councils have been awarded £40,300 to help the councils to:
  - a. upskill the development and finance teams to be able to competently use and understand viability and to confidently set our financial parameters for various tenures. Increasing the knowledge and skills in this area will speed up the Councils consideration and delivery of proposed schemes. It will also provide comfort to our stakeholders i.e. tenants/ residents, Councillors, Homes England that we are using public funds wisely and achieving the very best value for money that we can.
  - b. implement MSDC's clear ambition to deliver sustainable homes so that we are contributing to the reduction in CO2 emissions and water use, and that we consider the whole cost to tenants of living in their homes. Energy efficient homes keep tenants warm and healthy without the huge bills. The Council will also look to reduce the costs of long-term maintenance costs for the Council stock which could provide savings in the long term for the HRA. It is proposed to create 3 new specifications giving increasing levels of sustainability. We will also explore the use of modern methods of construction/best practice and aim to use local SMEs (subject to the suitability of their products).
2. **Shop Front Grant Scheme**

The Council launched its Shop Front Grant scheme last Summer to help refresh the high streets in Eye, Needham Market and Stowmarket. Following representations, the scheme was extended across the whole district. Originally intended to cover improvement work and updating of signage, the scheme has now been further extended to include grants for repairs and cosmetic improvements. Grants are also available to help improve access into the premises.
3. **Public developers' contributions database**

Mid Suffolk and Babergh's Exacom database – which gives the public access to figures for developer contributions towards infrastructure all the way back to 1974 – has been awarded the Bronze prize in the iESE Awards. The database, which is the first of its kind in the country, is also in the running for an award within the Royal Town Planning Institute's (RTPI) Awards for Planning Excellence.

#### **4. Development of a Suffolk Local Growth Fund.**

During 2018/2019, Suffolk was successful in becoming a Government 100% Business Rate Retention Pilot. This additional money, in the region of £10m, is being spent on a variety of economic, social and community projects across Suffolk. Suffolk applied, but was unsuccessful, in becoming a 75% Business Rate Retention Pilot in 2019/2020.

It is clear, from the past use of the Business Rate Pool and the 100% Business Rate Retention Pilot, that relatively small amounts of investment from the public sector can act as a significant catalyst for local growth and, Suffolk Public Sector Leaders therefore propose to ring-fence £2m from the pool to create a Suffolk Local Growth Fund operating under the same arrangements as the 100% Business Rate Retention Pilot Scheme.

Each 'area' of Suffolk – West Suffolk; East Suffolk; Ipswich; and Babergh and Mid-Suffolk – will be allocated £500,000 to spend on local Growth Projects. Proposals would be initiated and developed by both the local District/Borough Council and the County Council and the final list would be agreed between District/Borough Councils and the County Council in each area.

Projects would need to demonstrate:

- Purpose of the project with supporting evidence
- Added social/economic value
- Return on investment
- Deliverability and impact within a short timescale
- Clear timescales
- Ability to commence work within the next 6 months
- Sustainability and opportunities to recycle investment (e.g. reduction in demand for services; generation of business rates)

As the Accountable Body, Suffolk County Council will need to earmark, through its Cabinet, the use of £2m from the Business Rates Pool for a Suffolk Local Growth Fund and decisions on the individual schemes and project would be made through the local District/Borough Council's decision-making processes.

**Cllr. Nick Gowrley**  
**Leader – Mid Suffolk District Council**  
**17<sup>th</sup> March 2019**