

Mid Suffolk District Council Meeting 26 September 2019

Questions for Cabinet Members

Question 1 CMU1

Councillor John Matthissen to the Cabinet Member for Assets and Investments

When will you next revalue the retail and restaurant properties bought by CIFCO, bearing in mind the sector has another round of closures under way?

Response

CIFCO re-values all of its assets on an annual basis. Its valuers (Knight Frank) are due to revalue the portfolio again in March 2020.

Question 1 CMU3

Councillor Keith Welham to the Cabinet Member for Communities

Early this year, Council approved a Communities Strategy. Could the Cabinet Member for Communities please:

1. Give some examples of where the strategy has enabled joint working to deliver new or improved services to rural communities
2. Give some examples of strategic delivery partnerships which have been set up
3. Tell us if there have been any new services or activities set up or developed which could with benefit be expanded for delivery across rural Mid Suffolk
4. Identify challenges or obstacles which have been encountered and how ward members could be asked to assist with meeting the challenges and overcoming the obstacles.
5. Detail where there are staff vacancies in the Communities Team and how they are delaying delivery of services

Response

1. The Council works with a range of partners to help improve services to our communities – from County Council and Health colleagues to those in the voluntary sector including organisations like Citizens Advice and Community Action Suffolk. It's difficult to say what joint working is a direct result of the Communities Strategy but it has certainly helped reinforce open and inclusive ways of working.

2. There have not been any new strategic delivery partnerships as a direct result of the Strategy yet. Officers will be discussing the Delivery Plan for the strategy at my next Cabinet Briefing but I would be happy to discuss any thoughts or suggestions you have outside the meeting.

Senior Officers are also in conversation with senior officers in Health about how to integrate health and new housing through planning in more effective ways as well as

developing projects to support digital inclusion and working how we can develop our housing stock to improve health outcomes and address health inequalities.

3. New activities are changing within our communities all the time. Some start; others stop. Paragraphs 3.1 to 3.9 of my reports refers to a range of activities delivered over the past 6 months and I'm particularly enthusiastic about the potential of social prescribing, which is really starting to take shape among significant parts of the Districts now.

There is too much happening to list it all here but to give more of a flavour, Officers in the team have been supporting the Needham Market Train Station Access for All group to apply for funding to enable disabled access to the north side platform; Brome and Oakley village hall to improve facilities; Needham Market Community Centre to deliver new sports courts; Needham Market Town Council to improve Crowley Park; Claydon Football Club to develop their facilities; Claydon, Hartismere and Thurston High Schools to deliver dual use facilities; Debenham Leisure Centre to provide a hub; working with Gislingham, Bacton, Eye, Haughley, Stowupland on sports-related projects; and Walsham le Willows and Badwell Ash on play-related projects.

As well as the Active Wellbeing and Active Sports programmes referred to at Paragraph 3.7 and 3.8 of my report, officers are active participants in the Ipswich and East and West Health Alliances. Officers are also helping promote the 'How are you Suffolk?' mental health campaign; supporting Dementia Alliances across the District; supporting 'Chat and Chill' sessions for parents in Stowmarket; working with Suffolk Artlink to deliver 'Jumpstart' which provides creative activities for adults with learning disabilities; supporting 'Around the Table' providing carers with practical food and cooking workshops in Claydon; working with the Rural Coffee Caravan and Dance East to deliver 'Celebrating Age' a partnership project providing 38 arts activities for older people across a range of rural locations; helping set up a Sporting memories project in Debenham linked to the Debenham dementia project; supporting a new Live Well class at Stradbroke Leisure Centre; and helping support the creation of a Women on Wheels event in Stowmarket.

Officers are also creating a mental health directory to support staff and customers to signpost to support services for those with mental health issues; working with the Suffolk Association of Local Councils (SALC) to provide a Health and Wellbeing network for Town and Parish Councils; developing the Fit Villages project with Active Suffolk; developing Health Walks with One Life Suffolk; and supporting the planning for the national Women's Cycling Tour.

As you can see, there is lots of fantastic work underway and I will be working with the team so that we can provide a more comprehensive All Member briefing as described in paragraph 3.10 of my report.

4. One particular challenge recently has included working to address changes to rural bus routes. I have been working with other Councillors as well as Officers from both the District and County Council and have encouraged officers to provide an all

Councillor briefing on the issue soon. It really affects my villages and I know a number of people are concerned.

5. As you'll note from paragraph 3.11 of my report, new Grants officers, Josh Holmes and Roy Emmerson, are in place (with Roy due to start on Monday) and I can also now report that we have been successful in recruiting to the vacant Community Safety role.

Question 1 CMU5

Councillor John Matthissen to Cabinet Member for Economic Growth or Housing

It is now 2 ½ years since the Council bought Paddock House in Eye, during which time it has become an eyesore deeply resented by local people. When will the necessary management resource be available to develop it?

Response

Further to the original public consultation, by the Council, in Spring 2018 the community of Eye made a number of representations to the late Cllr Michael Burke and officers at the Council. Following the review of these comments it became apparent that the planned proposed development of the site was not supported by the community due to their aspiration to gain a larger provision of public open space. Continued dialogue and consultation with key community members, and the Town Council, has been undertaken with new schemes created. The Council has recently been able to agree a scheme, with Eye Town Council, that will be summited to planning by the end of the year with the expected development of the site to take place by the end of 2020.

To answer the question with regards to resource we can confirm that throughout the process the appropriate resources has been provided and this will continue until the development is completed. The delivery of this complex housing site is important but the most important outcome for Eye is delivering the best development for the town.

Question 2 CMU5

Councillor John Matthissen to Cabinet Member for Economic Growth or Housing

Will you publish all MSDC written and verbal input to Local Economic Partnership (LEP) preparation and drafting of the Norfolk and Suffolk Local Industrial Strategy including the full text, dates and who was involved?

Response

In principle yes. We can definitely provide the responses we have made to the LEP However, as a lot of this is information from the LEP itself, we will need to speak with them first before releasing the information.

Question 1 CMU6

Councillor Daniel Pratt to Cabinet Member for the Environment

Waste & Recycling: Route Changes

Despite the District Councils statistical record on the success of the round changes, I have received numerous complaints from my constituents over August regarding the delay in collecting the waste and recycling. This could have been partly avoided had not the council decided to change the rounds teams.

- 1) I would like to know what was the objective behind changing the crew.
- 2) How does the council justify discarding years of local knowledge of the rounds.
- 3) Would the council like to take the opportunity to apologise for those who have not have their bins collected through no fault of their own?

In reference to Cllr Mellen's question, I would too like to know why the council has failed to invest in electric powered refuse lorries. Diesel powered lorries are incredibly fuel inefficient and an electric fleet would have better contributed to our target to be carbon neutral by 2030 and made savings of £100's per day per lorry.

Response

The round review resulted in the generation of 100 new collection routes, unfortunately it was not possible to keep all collection crews with areas they were familiar with, however where possible Serco have tried to match areas with the old crews that had knowledge of the area.

Electric Refuse collection vehicles are still under development and although under trials in some areas, we're not aware of any LA moving to an electric fleet at present.

We will continue to review the situation with Serco and when viable alternatives to diesel powered trucks become available, we'd investigate the options to replace our fleet over its normal 7-year cycle.

A limited number of electric demonstrator vehicles are now coming into the marketplace, and we will be looking into these as an option as our fleet replacement programme develops, our current main line fleet is due for replacement in 2023.

Waste & Recycling: National Waste Strategy

Question 2 CMU6

Councillor Daniel Pratt to Cabinet Member for the Environment

Residents from my ward have questioned the traceability of the plastic waste that we collect to be recycled. Can the council provide answers to the following questions:

- 1) Can the council hold the contractor accountable for where and how our plastic waste is recycled.
- 2) What is the mechanism for holding the contractor to account and what is the regularity of enquiry regarding the end point of our plastic waste.
- 3) Where does our plastic end up and how is it recycled.

Response

Plastics end destinations:

We publish information through the Suffolk Waste Partnership

<https://www.suffolkrecycling.org.uk/learning-zone/where-recycling-goes>

[The below is an extract from the link](#)

Exported materials are sold to various Environment Agency-accredited and licensed processing facilities abroad where they become an “end-of-waste product” which specifies no further onward trading as waste. An end-of-waste product refers to waste which has been reprocessed, often to produce a pellet or flake, which can be reused as a recyclable material.

Viridor, who are the company contracted to sort and sell Suffolk's household recycling operate an Audit Process with UK Authorities and the Environment Agency before recovered materials are shipped. Further audit is completed before recovered materials are sold to re-processors to ensure the supply-chain is fully verified in advance of implementation. Viridor are committed to the highest standards of business and ethical conduct and demonstrate considerable expertise in this area.”

Question 3 CMU6

Councillor Daniel Pratt to Cabinet Member for the Environment

Sustainable Environment

The Joint Climate Change Task Force will see a cross party panel of members joint together to help tackle this issue for our Councils. The District Council has supported Suffolk County Council and Ipswich Borough Council's consultation for the Ipswich Northern Route. I put the question to the full council in our previous full council meeting: Can the District Council withhold it's support for the Ipswich Northern Route in light of the climate emergency?" The response came that it was a "County Council" matter, however, you are in support of the route and should answer this question directly. With reference to the Climate Emergency, can the District Council guarantee that it will withhold its support for building a new road that will cause considerable damage to our natural environment and climate. Can the District Council also take serious consideration to the alternative options, that must include reinstating and improving our bus services, purpose-built cycle routes, and improving connections to the main transport hubs?

Response

“As you will be aware the purpose of the recent consultation was to inform, and form part of, the wider Strategic Outline Business Case (‘SOBC’). We will not therefore be forming an opinion as to the merits of this until there is a finalised SOBC and we have all had proper time to consider it in detail.”

Question 4 CMU6

Councillor Mellen to Cabinet Member for the Environment

The motion on declaring a climate emergency agreed at Council in July stated that a task force would start work in September. In the report paragraph 3.17 says that this group will now commence in October. What is the reason for the delay?

Response

Work has started behind the scenes including with Suffolk County Council to help steer and coordinate the environment work and avoid time wasted, the TF will convene in early October.

Question 5 CMU6

Councillor Mellen to Cabinet Member for the Environment

The recent changes in bin collection rounds have been said to reduce travel times for the waste freighters and reduce carbon emissions. Has any investigations been done into switching from diesel powered vehicles to other alternatives?

Response

Electric Refuse collection vehicles are still under development and although under trials in some areas, we're not aware of any LA moving to an electric fleet at present.

We will continue to review the situation with Serco and when viable alternatives to diesel powered trucks become available, we'd investigate the options to replace our fleet over its normal 7-year cycle.

A limited number of electric demonstrator vehicles are now coming into the marketplace, and we will be looking into these as an option as our fleet replacement programme develops, our current main line fleet is due for replacement in 2023.

Question 1 CMU7

Councillor Rowland Warboys to the Cabinet Member for Finance

What assessments are we making of investments made on behalf of Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils, in particular the General Fund, with regards to progress towards meeting the Councils' Carbon Net Zero Targets

Response

As your question has been directed to me as Cabinet Member for Finance, I am assuming that you mean the treasury management investments that the council makes and not anything that is based around physical assets as the latter would need to be directed to one of my Cabinet colleagues. Before I answer however, I must make the observation that you refer in your question to "the Councils' Carbon Net Zero Targets". The motion agreed by Full Council in August did not contain that phrase, but rather it pledges "the ambition to make Babergh & Mid Suffolk Councils carbon

neutral by 2030". I will respond to your question on that basis. We are currently working to the 2019/20 Treasury Management Strategy that was approved by the Council in February before the ambition expressed in the climate change challenge motion was adopted. When we are preparing the 2020/21 Strategy later this year, we can explore with our treasury management advisers, Arlingclose, what changes could or should be made to the draft 2020/21 Strategy to reflect this new ambition. The 2020/21 draft Strategy will then be presented to Council in February 2020 for approval.

Question 1 CMU8

Councillor Sarah Mansel to the Cabinet for Housing and Cabinet Member for Economic Growth

I was pleased to see some houses for social rent are to be included in our development of the Stowmarket Middle School Site. Given that there have been recent comments in the press regarding a national need for more social rent housing, what proportion of MSDC's proposed new council housing will be for social rent?

Response

We will continue to provide homes for social rent wherever possible, however it will always be dependent on the costs of bringing forward schemes and how these are funded. Since 2015 we have delivered a total of 99 new homes which include social and affordable rent as well as shared ownership. Our Affordable Housing Programme is funded through new borrowing, Homes England Grant, and reserves. Over the next four years it is forecast that we will invest £35 Million on New Homes Delivery.

Question 2 CMU8

Councillor Sarah Mansel to the Cabinet for Housing

When the Joint Housing Board was disbanded a couple of years ago, it was agreed that a member sounding panel would be formed. Now that the Tenant Board has been established, when will the Member board be instigated?

Response

The Tenant Board has worked hard since its inception and has recently completed a draft of its first scrutiny project (looking at aspects of the BMBS repairs service). They will shortly be helping us look more closely at the Star survey results and thinking about action plans to improve some of the key areas of our work.

We have also completed one Tenant Sounding Board project, looking at our rent letters and how we can improve our written communication around rent collection.

A paper on the possible composition of a Member's Sounding Board is being drafted and it will be added to the Forward Plan as soon as possible.

Question 3 CMU8

Councillor Sarah Mansel to the Cabinet for Housing

Whilst it is pleasing to see a reduction in void times, what is our target for this? Also is there any significant reason why Babergh's void times are about 2/3 the length of ours?

Response

Our original target for Void times was an average of 21 days by 2020/21. The Void Project has clearly demonstrated that whilst it was originally an ambitious target the work of officers and members has resulted in us exceeding it. Officers are now working towards reducing the average times further and will be setting new targets for staff to achieve. The variation in number is purely as a result of the number of empty homes being returned and the condition of those properties in each District. The approach and service being delivered by officers is the same in both districts.

Question1 CMU9

Councillor Mellen to Cabinet Member for Planning

The council received a letter from the environmental legal team "Client earth" regarding our emerging Local Plan complying with current UK environment legislation, requesting a response in October. Has a response been drafted and how did this answer the questions raised by Client Earth?

Response

Several other Councils received the same legal letter from "Client earth". We are therefore working in conjunction with these other Councils, through the Local Government Association, to reply.

Question 2 CMU8

Councillor Wendy Turner to Cabinet Member for Communities

3.8 UNIVERSAL CREDIT

As of 1 July 2019, there were a total of 209 council tenants in receipt of Universal Credit across the two districts (up from 102 tenants in December 2018); 129 in Mid Suffolk and 161 in Babergh.

Why has the number of council tenants in receipt of Universal Credit doubled in 6 months? Is there any data to explain this huge rise which might help prevent further increases in the future?

Response

The roll out of the full digital service for Universal Credit was completed on 12 December 2018. Any new claimants, or existing claimants whose change of circumstances amount to a new claim, will now move straight onto Universal Credit.

The next stage of the process is called ‘managed migration’, which is where claimants transfer from existing benefits or tax credits onto Universal Credit. This process is being piloted between July 2019 and July 2020 by inviting existing claimants to make a Universal Credit claim, with the expectation that managed migration will be fully underway by the end of 2020. The government plan to complete the managed migration process by December 2023.

The rise in claimants in Babergh and Mid Suffolk is almost entirely driven by new claims, or changes in circumstances that have led to a new claim, a process known as ‘natural migration’. We expect to see a steady rise in these numbers. It is difficult to anticipate how quickly the number of claimants will rise as part of managed migration as much depends on the outcome of the pilot, but we will be keeping a careful eye on it.

Question 3 CMU8

Councillor Wendy Turner to Cabinet Member for Communities

3.13 Half-way house. Where is it located and how many residents does it cater for at one time?

Response

The property is located in Hoxne and provides a suitably adapted property for an individual who is ready to leave Hospital but whose own accommodation requires adaptation or alterations before they can return home. This approach is used elsewhere in Suffolk and the scheme is known as ‘Stepping Home’.

Question 4 CMU8

Councillor Wendy Turner to Cabinet Member for Communities

3.16 Affordable housing.

Why were only 23 affordable houses built in 2018/19?

Why are no more scheduled to be built in the first two quarters of 2019/20 in Mid Suffolk when we have such a desperate need of them?

Response

We are currently working with Icen Homes and through our Joint Venture with Norse to deliver a programme of new affordable homes over the next few years. Many of these will begin to be built during the next six to nine months. Officers are working extremely hard to ensure that we have a continuous programme of new build development from initial conception through to design and build. This is naturally

reliant on many variables including available finance and sites being available. I am personally proud that we built as many as 23 new homes last year and grew our stock rather than the many years of seeing it reduce due to Right to Buy.