

Mid Suffolk District Council Meeting

Questions for Council

Question 1

Councillor Eburne to Councillor Morley, Leader of the Council

“The cost of Member allowances and expenses has increased from £269,393.13 in 2017/18 to £442,563.39, a difference of £173,170.26.

Please can you provide the explanation for this increase.”

Response

There was a one-off increase in the member allowances in 18/19 due to the back payment of the basic allowance and special responsibility allowances that was made following a review of the Members Remuneration Scheme, carried out by the Independent Remuneration Panel. The Panel was tasked with looking at members’ allowances and to take into account the changes to members’ roles following the creation of the Leader /Cabinet model which was constituted in May 2017. The new scheme was adopted by full Council in June 2018.

The figures forecast for 19/20 show a projected decrease in the amount of members’ allowances which will be a more accurate reflection of the cost following a reduction in the number of members since the elections in May 2019.

Question 2

Councillor Geake to Councillor Brewster Cabinet Member for Economic Growth,

We recently heard from the Cabinet Member for Economic Growth, that part of our ongoing work on project delivery, for Regeneration and Capital projects, will take account of climate change. As stronger economic growth tends to be closely linked to a higher carbon footprint, and as we are now in a climate crisis, could we be told which parts of the Council’s work on regeneration and capital projects will *not* take account of climate change?”

Response

As part of the refreshed project management framework across both councils all project initiation documents have a section on the environment. Project managers, when commencing a project and throughout the life of that project, are required to complete an environmental impact assessment which consider positive and negative environmental impacts of each scheme. As new projects come to the various Programme Boards, environmental impact is considered as part of the overall deliverability. This means every regeneration and capital project will take account of climate change and will ensure any impacts are assessed and properly mitigated.

Question 3

Councillor Welham to Councillor Flatman Cabinet Member for Communities

The Council is making a grant to Mid Suffolk Citizens Advice of £86,700 per annum for each of the next three years. Could we please be assured that there are no specific conditions attached to the making of the grant?

Response

A grant of this nature will clearly have reasonable conditions attached – that the applicant uses the money for the purposes set out in their application, for example, and that they deliver the proposed outputs. I can reassure you that these conditions will be agreed with the Mid Suffolk Citizens Advice prior to issuing the offer letter, rather than simply being imposed upon them without dialogue.

Question 4

Councillor Welham to the Leader of the Council

The Corporate Outputs document was discussed at a Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 8 January 2020. A number of the outputs are stated as giving support to various initiatives. Could we have clarity around the type of support to be given, particularly whether it is financial support or support by Officers and/or Members of the two Councils, and what outcomes are expected in respect of each of these initiatives?

Response

As was explained during the Overview & Scrutiny Committee meeting there are approximately 9 Mid Suffolk references to 'providing support' in the Corporate Outputs. These reflect the fact that the Council has an impact not just in terms of what it directly delivers but also by working in partnership with others where the partner is the lead. The reference to support therefore relates to political and officer support but does not exclude financial support. Where any proposal for direct financial support is made however this will come forward through Cabinet for decisions. I think the intended outcomes for each of these is obvious from the document, for example for the Museum of East Anglian Life to become the National Museum for Food, for businesses to access our local shop front and accessibility funding etc but I am happy to provide further details outside of the meeting for anywhere Councillor Welham has additional queries.

Question 5

Councillor Welham to Councillor Morley, Leader of the Council

At a Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 8 January, the Leader of our Council stated that various Task Groups would be providing the timescales for achieving the outcomes to be achieved in 2020/21 and beyond. Are Task Groups

actively working towards providing agreed programme dates to be included in the document before the start of Municipal Year 2020/21?

Response

I believe that the Chief Executive addressed a similar question to this at the Cabinet Meeting that adopted these Corporate Outputs. As he explained this is intended to be the first and last time that the Corporate Outputs are presented to Councillors in this way. This is a reflection of the fact that the outputs were developed in parallel with the Corporate Plan. Now that the Corporate Plan and these Outputs have been adopted, they are being incorporated into action plans for each of our 6 Strategic Priorities. These actions plans are a combination of work that is already underway and new actions. Performance will then be measured from Quarter 1 of 2020/21 against these action plans. With this in mind officers are, at my request, conducting a review of our performance framework.

Question 6

Councillor Mansel to Councillor Burn, Cabinet Member for Planning

Two of our adopted Neighbourhood Plans have recently been put to the test at planning referrals committee. Recommendations from development control officers were to go against Neighbourhood Plan policies, because they felt that they were lacking in housing allocations and/or policy wording. Given that MSDC is obliged to support communities making Neighbourhood Plans, how are we ensuring that they are getting the best impartial advice?

Response

Written Answer: Neighbourhood Planning (NP) provides local communities with the opportunity to have their say in where they would like to see new housing come forward but, with that, comes a certain degree of responsibility that those same groups will need to identify and allocate a sufficient supply of sites to meet not just locally identified need but also to enable the District Council to meet its wider housing delivery objectives. In reality, what we have seen over the last few years is a number of communities bringing forward Neighbourhood Plans in advance of our new planning framework being in place and, in effect, only going as far as allocating what already has permission.

To be successful at examination, one of the 'basic conditions' against which such plans are tested is their general conformity with district level planning policy. This is something that has also been touched upon in a number of recent Neighbourhood Plan Examination Reports published on this Council's website and should also act as a signal to all other prospective Neighbourhood Plan Groups. In summary, that advice is:

- *There is no legal requirement to examine a Neighbourhood Plan against emerging policy. **However**, Planning Practice Guidance on Neighbourhood Planning [PPG para 009 ref id 41-009-20160211] advises that **the reasoning and evidence informing the Local Plan process may be relevant to the consideration of the basic conditions against which the Plan is tested.***

And, that where a Neighbourhood Plan is produced in parallel to the emerging Local Plan

- ***Conformity with emerging plans can extend the life of Neighbourhood Plans, providing this does not result in conflict with adopted policies.*** However, the *Joint Local Plan (JLP) Draft could change significantly and so this should be carefully considered. It is also important to be mindful of the fact it has been demonstrated for a number of years now that housing needs and provisions are unlikely to decrease significantly and that land supply has to be maintained through delivery.*

Where Neighbourhood Plans are being produced, the Council is proactive in engaging with a community from the outset. However, it is the responsibility of the community to develop their Neighbourhood Plan and, in many circumstances, they are directly appointing independent planning consultants to assist them. In addition, where plans do seek to allocate sites, there are support packages available through the Government's neighbourhood planning body, Locality.

Prior to Neighbourhood Plan Groups consulting us at the Regulation 14 Pre-submission stage, we encourage them to share their draft plan with us for informal feedback. The purpose of this exercise is also to identify likely significant issues in advance of any formal consultation in public. Before publication in July 2019 of the Preferred Options Joint Local Plan, and where appropriate, we have consistently advised Neighbourhood Plan Groups that a housing number higher than that currently being promoted through their Neighbourhood Plan could not be ruled out. Since July 2019, Neighbourhood Plan Groups have had an indicative (minimum) housing number that they should be planning for. It would be reasonable to expect that those Groups who had prepared a plan prior to publication of the draft Joint Local Plan in July 2019, but who had yet to formally submit their Plans to the District Council, to be mindful of our advice and, if necessary, consider whether they should modify their plan accordingly and re-run the Regulation 14 process. That does not appear to have happened in the case of Woolpit. In essence, groups need to be aware of changing national and local planning policy to ensure their plans are both compliant with the National Planning Policy Framework and emerging Development Plan policy.

It is also important to highlight that communities with adopted Neighbourhood Plans must keep them under review because of the progression of the emerging Babergh and Mid Suffolk Joint Local Plan and the evidence that underpins it on many aspects in relation to the social, economic and environmental factors. Neighbourhood Planning guidance informs that planning applications are decided in accordance with the development plan, unless material consideration indicates otherwise. It is for the decision maker in each case to determine what is a material consideration and what weight to give to it. In some cases this may mean an adopted Neighbourhood Plan does not hold as much weight as some other material consideration.