

MID SUFFOLK DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the Virtual meeting of the **MID SUFFOLK DISTRICT COUNCIL** held on Thursday, 26 November 2020

PRESENT:

Councillor: Barry Humphreys MBE (Chair)
Paul Ekpenyong (Vice-Chair)

Councillors:	Oliver Amorowson	Gerard Brewster
	David Burn	Terence Carter
	James Caston	John Field
	Julie Flatman	Jessica Fleming
	Dr Helen Geake	Peter Gould
	Kathie Guthrie	Lavinia Hadingham
	Matthew Hicks	Sarah Mansel
	John Matthissen	Andrew Mellen
	Richard Meyer	Suzie Morley
	David Muller	Mike Norris
	Penny Otton	Timothy Passmore
	Dr Daniel Pratt	Harry Richardson
	Keith Scarff	Andrew Stringer
	Wendy Turner	Rowland Warboys
	Keith Welham	John Whitehead

In attendance:

Officers: Chief Executive (AC)
Assistant Director Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer (EY)
Assistant Director - Customer Services (SW)
Assistant Director - Environment and Commercial Partnerships (CC)
Assistant Director - Economic Development & Regeneration (FD)
Corporate Manager - ICT (MH)
Corporate Manager - Governance and Civic Office (JR)
Licensing Officer - (KS/KG)
Senior Governance Support Officer (HH)

Apologies:

Councillors: Rachel Eburne
Stephen Phillips

24 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS BY COUNCILLORS

25 URGENT MOTION ON NOTICE

- 25.1 The Chair advised that he would take Item 12 before Item 3 on the agenda. He referred to the Tabled Papers and invited Councillor Morley, the Leader to present and move her Motion.

25.2 Councillor Morley provided the following introduction:

This administration has consistently pursued the use of technology to provide the public and press with an enhanced level of access and engagement in our meetings. This approach has been crucial during the covid-19 pandemic where we have maintained open, accountable and transparent democracy by fully embracing virtual meetings. Indeed, Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils were the first Councils in Suffolk to hold fully virtual meetings open to the public. An extension to our use of technology in virtual meetings, is the adoption of e-voting to replace the lengthy and cumbersome process of roll call voting. Temporary alterations to the constitution to allow e-voting have already been made by the Monitoring Officer under delegation, however I firmly believe e-voting is the way forward for a robust and efficient means of voting for all our meetings whether virtual or in person. Hence, I am proposing that the Council adopts e-voting as its primary means of voting. I have also listened to the concerns raised by other Councillors about losing the current enhanced level of public access to voting, afforded by the process of roll call voting. This is essentially the ability of the public to see how each councillor votes on every item, something which we didn't even have in face-to-face meetings without the public physically being present in the meeting room. Therefore, this urgent motion also proposes a constitutional change to enable the publication of a record of voting at every meeting on the Council's website to ensure the highest level of openness and transparency. This will not negate the process for formally requesting a recorded vote for the purposes of the minutes or the statutory requirement to formally record the budget vote.

25.3 Councillor Morley thanked Councillor Stringer for his support of the Motion and then read out her Motion:

That this Council permanently adopts e-voting as its primary method of voting in all meetings and that a record of all votes cast at meetings of the Full Council, Cabinet and Committees be published on the Council's website with immediate effect. Further, that the Monitoring Officer be authorised to make the required amendments to the Council's constitution."

25.4 Councillor Morley **MOVED** the Motion, which was **SECONDED** by and Councillor Richardson.

25.5 Members debated the Motion including that electronic voting and the publication of the votes would enhance democracy, public access to meetings in relation to transparency, that e-voting would make deliberation more efficient and that elected Members could demonstrate how they had voted for public access purposes.

25.6 Councillor Morley summed up the debate and thanked Members for their support of the Motion.

25.7 The Motion was put to Members for voting.

By a unanimous vote

It was RESOLVED: -

That this Council permanently adopts e-voting as its primary method of voting in all meetings and that a record of all votes cast at meetings of the Full Council, Cabinet and Committees be published on the Council's website with immediate effect. Further, that the Monitoring Officer be authorised to make the required amendments to the Council's constitution.

26 MC/20/10 TO CONFIRM THE MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL MEETING HELD ON 24 SEPTEMBER 2020

It was RESOLVED:-

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 24 September 2020 be confirmed as a true record and signed at the next practicable opportunity.

27 MC/20/11 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

27.1 The Chairman referred to Paper MC/20/11, which was for noting.

27.2 He advised Members that he had been unable to present Councillor Hadingham with her Past Chairman's Badge personally but had requested that it be sent to her.

28 LEADER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

28.1 The Chairman invited the Leader of the Council to make her announcements.

28.2 Councillor Morley announced the following:

CIFCO Acquisitions – CIFCO had purchased three further properties this month totalling almost £10.5m, to bring in future income for Councils to invest back into local communities. These were two neighbouring warehouse buildings on Cosgrove Way Industrial Estate in Luton for £2.475m and an office building in Epsom town centre, in Upper High Street, for £7.97m. The industrial units were both let to building supplies company Wolseley UK Ltd. The office building was home to Epsom and St Helier University Hospitals NHS Trust on a long-term lease. This ensured low risk returns for the Councils at a time when Covid-19 was significantly affecting other traditional income streams.

Covid-19 Support Grants - This scheme had been expanded and the Additional Restrictions Grant was open to businesses, who were trading up to and including 4 November, who were instructed to close because of the national lockdown or could demonstrate that they had been significantly financially impacted by the National Coronavirus restriction measures. The funding available through the grant ranged from £1,334 to £3,000, in line with the Local Restrictions Support Grants. Applications for first round of Additional Restrictions Grant funding must be submitted by Friday 18th December.

Covid-19 Tiers - when national lockdown finished - Central Government had placed Suffolk in Tier 2 local restrictions from 2nd December. The main reasons cited for this were Suffolk's current COVID infection rates, local hotspots, and pressure on hospitals. Whilst Suffolk had so far seen comparatively lower levels of infection than elsewhere in the region and country, the current infection rate (85 cases per 100,000 people) was more than double what it was when Suffolk entered Tier 1 on 14 October (35 cases per 100,000 people). At the beginning of September, there were just 5 cases per 100,000 people. There were 116 COVID patients in Suffolk hospital beds as of the 23 November. Although Mid Suffolk numbers were fewer than the Suffolk average, residents still needed to "Stick With It Suffolk" because the virus was no respecter of boundaries. As Stuart Keeble said, "Every one of us needs to keep following the rules to stop the spread of COVID-19". People needed to ensure hospitals could continue to care for people who urgently needed help, including those without COVID. People needed to be responsible today for a better tomorrow.

28.1 Councillor Matthissen enquired if the Council would be seeking to borrow £30m for both authorities from the PWLB, to which Councillor Morley responded that the Council would be considering all aspects of the Government's announcement regarding authorities borrowing funding from the PWLB including the consequences for CIFCO.

In response to Councillor Field's question regarding the rental return and further acquisitions by CIFCO, the Chief Executive responded that the Covid-19 Pandemic had an influence on the rental market, and that CIFCO would take this into consideration for any future investments, as rental return was central in the decision-making process for the company.

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

29.1 The Corporate Manager – Governance and Civic Office and Deputy Monitoring Officer advised Members that the following petitions had been received:

1. Petition for Immediate Climate Action in Mid Suffolk District with 62 valid signatures.
2. Petition regarding the condition of the Fisons Site in Bramford with 136 valid signatures.

Both petitions would be dealt with through the usual processes.

30 QUESTIONS BY THE PUBLIC IN ACCORDANCE WITH COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULES

30.1 None received

QUESTIONS BY COUNCILLORS IN ACCORDANCE WITH COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULES**Councillor John Matthissen to the Cabinet Member for Finance**

Will you review the fossil fuel element of all council treasury and strategic investments, publish the results, and phase out all counter parties, projects, and investments which finance extraction, processing and distribution of fossil fuels?

Councillor Whitehead – Cabinet Member for Finance

Thank you for your question Councillor Matthissen. From, the research and investigations that I have made over the past few days I have amassed sufficient material to write a long essay or mini dissertation on this subject. However, I feel this is not the place for that so I will try to keep my answer as succinct as possible whilst hopefully still covering the major aspects.

This is a complex area where several strands could be considered around the environmental impact of investments and not just in relation to fossil fuels. So much is happening right now in this area and the Council has recently subscribed to a new service from our treasury management advisors, Arlingclose which will provide further advice and guidance in the coming months.

Our approved Treasury Management Strategy sets out the prime objectives for our treasury investments as being security, liquidity and yield in that order in accordance with CIPFA guidance. Our investments are generally in pooled funds where we hand over our money to professional investment managers to decide on individual investments. These are then actively managed, and I am confident that both technological advances and the Green agenda are very much to the forefront when investment decisions are made by our investment managers. An investment portfolio in 2040 will certainly look very different to today's – we may well have passed 'Peak Oil' and the extraction, processing and distribution of fossil fuels will decline in the years ahead. If you and I know this then our professional managers most certainly will too.

Where I suspect you and I may disagree is over the interpretation of the phrase "phase out" in your question. I see this as an evolution rather than a revolution. The Oil Majors are at the forefront of this evolution and I sincerely believe they have a major role to play in it and are paving the way with their own Research and Development. These large companies are throwing billions of dollars at renewables and at sustainable low-carbon and even zero-carbon solutions. Governments, universities, and new start-up companies have a significant role to play but we should not ignore the fact that the oil giants have both the determination and need to reinvent themselves and are in fact doing so. Responsible investors in these companies have a role to play. I certainly believe that role is not to disinvest and sell on to less scrupulous investors.

In considering the implications behind your question I am also very mindful of how our economy at present is still so dependent on oil in its day-to-day operations. Despite a sustained move to phase out the internal combustion engine over the next few years, many of our residents continue to rely on their cars and will certainly be visiting their nearest fuel station for some considerable time. Beyond their own vehicles, they will continue to rely on diesel-powered HGVs to stock their local supermarkets and to deliver bulky items to their doors. Enormous containerships will need heavy marine oil to transport items around the world. Farming relies on oil to power its combine-harvesters, tractors, and other machinery – without these what would our farming productivity look like? The vast majority of our residents still rely on oil or gas to heat their homes in the winter months.

The move to renewables is happening at an increasing pace, and clearly in the UK at a much quicker rate than in many larger, more populated countries. But for the foreseeable future the world will rely on the extraction, processing and distribution of fossil fuels and I for one, trust our professional managers to correctly reprofile our investment portfolios over time whilst meeting our agreed and established treasury management objectives.

Supplementary Question from Councillor Matthissen to Councillor Whitehead:

In paragraph four of the above response a reference was made that the oil majors were in the forefront of the evolution towards low carbon. This was currently not the evidence available, as oil majors had done a lot to delay the shift of the world's economy to low carbon and were still investing far more in prospecting and extracting fossil fuels than they were in renewables. Further, the oil major Exxon had dropped out the top 500 Share Index in the United States and that one of the companies coming into the Share Index was the electrical car company Tesla and he asked if the Council's advisors had recognised this.

Councillor Whitehead responded that the oil major companies were so vast and the amount of money they invested year on year was so phenomenal that even some movement into some renewables, despite the figures being quite large, were only a small percentage of the total investment but this was ever increasing. BP was working very closely in either Denmark or Germany to look at the use of offshore electricity to generate enough power to produce a great deal of hydrogen for the new developments, such as hydrogen as a fuel. These companies needed to reinvent themselves or they would disappear. He considered the impact of a new car company such as Tesla entering the 500 Share Index compared to an established car company such as Ford. He reassured Members that the Council's professional managers were managing the portfolios in an appropriate way.

32 MC/20/12 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE REPORT

- 32.1 The Chairman invited the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to introduce his report.
- 32.2 Councillor Welham introduced Paper MC/20/12 and presented a summary of the content of the report to Members.

33 RECOMMENDATIONS FROM CABINET / COMMITTEES

33.1 None received.

34 MC/20/13 LICENSING ACT 2003 - STATEMENT OF LICENSING POLICY STATUTORY FIVE-YEARLY ADOPTION

34.1 The Chairman invited the Chairman of the Licencing and Regulatory Committee to introduce Paper MC/20/13 and to move the recommendation in the report.

34.2 Councillor Guthrie said that a five-yearly review of the Statement of Licensing Policy for Mid Suffolk District Council had been undertaken and it was for Council to decide whether to adopt the revised policies. If approved the revised policy statement for Mid Suffolk would be adopted for publication and ready to take effect from 7 January 2021.

34.3 A public consultation was carried out between 20 August 2020 and 16 September 2020 in respect of the Statement of Licensing Policy for Mid Suffolk District Council. Section 5 of The Licensing Act 2003 required that each Licensing Authority determined and published a local 'Statement of Licensing Policy' relating to the discharge of its licensing functions under the Act. The legislation aimed to secure full cost-recovery of administering Licensing Act 2003 functions through fees payable for licence applications and ongoing maintenance. The fee banding system and fee levels were currently set by Central Government via Regulation (as they have been, unchanged, since 2005). The current draft would be the fifth edition of the Council's 'Statement of Licensing Policy' under the Licensing Act 2003.

34.4 The consultation had taken place over a period of four weeks, through various channels and media. No responses to the consultation in Mid Suffolk had been received. As well as all existing premises and club licence holders, 150 relevant businesses and organisations were consulted, including all of the Parish Councils. The Statement of Licensing Policy is based on the Licensing Act 2003 and the statutory guidance (section 182 guidance) which limited the degree to which it could be amended.

34.5 The draft 'Statement of Licensing Policy' for Mid Suffolk was considered by the Mid Suffolk Licensing and Regulatory Committee on 2nd October 2020. The matter of business closures during a lockdown was considered for inclusion in the Policy. The legal advice was that there was specific legislation covering these matters, breach of which might be relevant to trigger a review of a Premises Licence, but this did not need to be specifically mentioned in the Policy. The Committee voted unanimously to recommend to full Council that it be adopted without further amendment.

34.6 Councillor Guthrie **MOVED** Recommendation 3.1 in the report which was **SECONDED** by Councillor Norris.

- 34.7 Councillor Otton referred to page 60 of the report and commented that foreign employees had to provide a statement of evidence of the right to work in the UK, which demonstrated the Council's commitment to the anti-slavery act.
- 34.8 The recommendation was put to Member for voting.

By a unanimous vote.

It was RESOLVED: -

That the draft revision Licensing Act 2003 'Statement of Licensing Policy' document as attached as Appendix A to Paper MC/20/13 be adopted, for publication and to take effect for five years (unless sooner revised) from 7 January 2021.

35 MC/20/14 ICT STRATEGY

- 35.1 The Chairman invited the Cabinet Member for Customers, Digital Transformation and Improvement to introduce Paper MC/20/14, which was for comment only.
- 35.2 Councillor Morley introduced the report and said that the focus of the ICT Strategy was to ensure that ICT could enable better outcomes for residents and businesses, and that staff can fulfil their roles effectively and efficiently. It sought to unlock value in the existing partnership with Suffolk County Council and existing software estate. She thanked the Council's own ICT department, but also the ICT team at Suffolk County Council.
- 35.3 She invited Matthew Harding – Corporate Manager – ICT, to present a high-level summary of the ICT Strategy.
- 35.4 The Corporate Manager – ICT provided the presentation for the ICT Strategy.

Note: The meeting was adjourned between 6:13 pm to 6:23 pm.
Councillors Amorowson and Pratt left the meeting at 6:23 pm.

- 35.5 The Chairman invited Members to comment on the ICT Strategy and the presentation.
- 35.6 Councillor Passmore thought that in order to make access to Council's service easier for residents, connectivity to broadband and 5G were important factors. It was also crucial that data was used as evidence for allocating resources and that the public was informed on how this data was used. He felt that the ability to link with the voluntary services was important and whether this could be facilitated by platforms such as Zoom. He added that the ICT Strategy should provide a better service to residents and partners in the community.

- 35.7 Councillor Ekpenyong felt that the exchange of ideas within the Council's communities required good broadband connections, to enable local economy to grow and to alleviate isolation for residents.
- 35.8 Councillor Whitehead believed that people were in the centre of the ICT policy, but as the organisation moved to use ICT, more rigor had to be put in place.
- 35.9 Councillor Mansel commented that there was no mention of Members in the ICT Strategy, only customers and staff. She referred to the cloud-based solution on page 74 of the Strategy and was concerned for the cost and the security implications. She was also concerned whether the Council was looking at the carbon footprint for the data storage and services and if this complied with the Council's pledge to be carbon neutral by the year 2030.
- 35.10 The Corporate Manager – ICT responded that the green cost was being reviewed and that a number of the Council's vendors would be carbon neutral by the year 2030.
- 35.11 Councillor Geake thought that the use of the term customers in the document was inappropriate, as this indicated that they had choice for the services they wanted to access. She said that customers were not the same as residents, who were also citizens and asked that this was taken into consideration in the Council's policies and strategies.
- 35.12 Councillor Field felt there was nothing controversial in the document, if people used modern applications and that the technology and equipment actually worked and was reliable. It required that residents and officers be trained, and that Councillors did not struggle during meetings accessing the platforms used.
- 35.13 Councillor Fleming believed that the Strategy would support the management of the District, but that it was important to keep it simple. The management and sorting of data, the integration of old data and hard copies would need to be undertaken. Consideration that Cloud storage was carbon intensive due to the coolant of the systems had to be included, however, the Council would be able to share and access information effectively with residents, which would benefit residents and the community.
- 35.14 Councillor Richardson thought this was an opportunity to improve services to residents and customers by making the service more efficient, user friendly to provide better services for residents. It would also enable the Council to reach isolated Members and lonely residents in the communities. He considered the impact on the Council itself and Members and one of the reflections during the last few months was the relationship for home and flexible working, which had qualitative effect for people in the workforce. He hoped this could be retained in future. Virtually meeting would make local government more accessible for working people. Indirectly he thought that the ICT Strategy would have an impact on the Council's Climate Change and Biodiversity Strategies, as they benefitted from meetings held virtually and

reduced carbon footprint by officers and Members not travelling and commuting to meetings and work. The Council's Biodiversity action plan would also benefit from the usage of data, which could be used for geographical work in areas such as tree planting and planning. Further, the Council could take a holistic approach by using third party data relating to issues such as air pollution.

35.15 Councillor Brewster commented that ICT had helped the Council to respond to the Covid-19 Pandemic and had enabled the Council to provide support to residents by using existing tools such as online forms for the application of the Business Grants.

35.16 Councillor Warboys believed it was important to embrace technology. However, he was concerned for the security of the data and thought the Council must ensure that residents' data was protected from hacking. He thought that as dependence on technology increased so did vulnerability. He added that many of the most vulnerable residents found it difficult to access ICT hardware either due to cost or due to access issues.

35.17 Councillor Morley thanked Members for their comments and thoughts and stated that the ICT strategy would not replace a friendly person at the end of the telephone but would allow staff to free up time to engage with the people, who need their help.

36 COUNCILLOR APPOINTMENTS

36.1 The Chairman invited the Leader to announce Councillor appointments.

36.2 Councillor Morley **PROPOSED** that that Councillor Peter Gould be appointed to the Constitution Working Group and Councillor Julie Flatman be appointed to the Member Learning and Development Working Group, which was **SECONDED** by Councillor Brewster.

By 30 votes for and 2 abstentions.

It was RESOLVED:-

That Councillor Peter Gould be appointed to the Constitution Working Group and Councillor Julie Flatman be appointed to the Member Learning and Development Working Group.

The business of the meeting was concluded at 6:59 pm.

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Chair