

MID SUFFOLK DISTRICT COUNCIL

TO: Council	REPORT NUMBER: MC/20/28
FROM: Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee	DATE OF MEETING: 25 March 2021

The Mid Suffolk Overview & Scrutiny Committee met on 14 January and considered the following items:

MID SUFFOLK DISTRICT COUNCIL'S DRAFT GENERAL FUND BUDGET 2021/22 AND FOUR-YEAR OUTLOOK

The Mid Suffolk Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered a report on the Council's Draft General Fund Budget and Four-Year Outlook and the considerable detail given in appendices to the report. Members asked a number of questions around the detail in the report and made suggestions where it was felt that greater clarity would assist Council in understanding the budget proposals.

The need for extra resources for planning enforcement and planning inquiries was discussed. Members also felt that extra resources for the legal costs associated with planning are required.

In respect of the over-arching principles set out in the report, members felt that staff welfare and mental health are of great importance and the principles should ensure a focus on the wellbeing of staff. Members asked for further clarification of the biodiversity fund to be included in the report to Council. Members recognised the uncertain financial future and concluded that the budget was sound, given the circumstances under which it has been prepared.

Members resolved:

- **That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee asks that Officers and Cabinet take into consideration the comments made at this meeting when submitting the General Fund Budget 2021/22 and Four-year Outlook for consideration at the Cabinet and Council meetings in February 2021;**
- **That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee asks that Cabinet considers funding be allocated for planning enforcement and legal costs associated with planning.**

MID SUFFOLK DISTRICT COUNCIL'S HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT (HRA) BUDGET 2021/22 AND FOUR-YEAR OUTLOOK

Members considered the report before them and the detail included in the appendices; they commended officers on the quality of the report. There were a number of queries around capital receipts and the right to buy, all of which were dealt with by officers. Members also queried the need to increase council house rents and utility charges but were satisfied that the explanations given for the increases were clear. Very few other comments were made.

Members resolved:

- **That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee endorses the Housing Revenue Account Budget 2021/22 and Four-Year Outlook but asks that Officers and Cabinet Members take into consideration the comments made at the meeting when submitting the budget for consideration at the Cabinet and Council meetings in February 2021.**

REVIEW OF REPRESENTATION ON OUTSIDE BODIES – ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATION

Members considered an additional recommendation in respect of representation on outside bodies and resolved:

- **That the Mid Suffolk Overview and Scrutiny Committee recommends that Mid Suffolk District Council approaches the Suffolk Disabilities Forum to establish whether formal councillor representation on the forum would be appropriate and possible and that any appointment to the Suffolk Disabilities Forum be made by resolution of the Full Council.**

The Joint Overview & Scrutiny Committee met on 15 February and considered the following item:

REVIEW OF LOCAL CITIZENS ADVICE SERVICE

The Joint Committee received a report from the Corporate Manager, Communities and a presentation from the 3 chief executive officers of Mid Suffolk, Sudbury and District and Ipswich Citizens Advice.

Committee noted that the Citizens Advice service to Eye had not been provided from Diss and Thetford during the current year and Mid Suffolk CA are putting in place an outreach service into the former bank. Members suggested that the funding allocated to, but not claimed by, Diss and Thetford CA be re-allocated to Mid Suffolk CA as the sole CA provider in Mid Suffolk.

Committee heard how workload at CAs had increased during the COVID-19 restrictions. Some of the reasons are:

- Reduction in residents' income due to furloughing or reduced working hours;
- Redundancy;
- Debt, often due to loss of income;
- Fear of loss of home;
- Stress caused by spending more time indoors with family members;
- Fear of abuse, actual abuse;
- Lack of facilities for home schooling;
- Loss of free school meals causing financial pressures;
- Temporary closure of Ipswich Street, Stowmarket Customer Access Point.

CAs incurred additional costs for provision of IT for working from home and screens etc to allow some face to face consultations.

Committee also heard how CA income from some of their regular funders would not be forthcoming in 2021/22. Mid Suffolk CA stated that they have a funding shortfall for next year of around £30k.

Members agreed that it had been the intention arising from last year's review for Mid Suffolk CA and Sudbury and District CA to have a 3-year funding agreement with index linking. There seemed to be some uncertainty over whether the index linking was being applied for 2021/22.

The merits of a MSDC appointed observer to attend meetings at Mid Suffolk CA were discussed and it was concluded that such an appointment would be beneficial to the Council and the CA and welcomed by the CA.

At the end of a lengthy debate the following recommendations were agreed:

- **That the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee is satisfied and notes the content of the report and commends the work of the Mid Suffolk Local Citizens Advice and Sudbury and District Local Citizens Advice;**
- **That the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee confirm the previous resolution made at the last review that the three-year rolling funding review be subject to indexation on an annual review basis, finances permitting, as measures of the importance we attach to ongoing LCA funding.**