

MID SUFFOLK DISTRICT COUNCIL

TO: Cabinet	REPORT NUMBER: MCa/21/27
FROM: Councillor Suzie Morley, Leader of the Council	DATE OF MEETING: 1 st November 2021
OFFICER: Kathy Nixon, Strategic Director	KEY DECISION REF NO. CAB320

FUNDING TO SUPPORT THE STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The Council's Joint Corporate Plan sets out six strategic priorities, namely Communities, Environment, Economy, Customers, Housing and Wellbeing.
- 1.2 When Council considered the General Fund Budget for 2021/22 at its meeting on 18th February 2021, it resolved to allocate an additional £4m for investment in the economy, housing, wellbeing and communities and, following cross-party input, to bring recommendations for that expenditure to Cabinet for approval. This report sets out those recommendations, which have been developed following input at all-Member workshops and amount to a total value of £5.138m.

2. OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 2.1 Option One: To release substantial additional funding to develop new and extended programmes of work to address the priorities in the Economy Strategy, Homes and Housing Strategy, Communities Strategy, Wellbeing Strategy and Leisure, Sport and Physical Activity Strategy.
- 2.2 Option Two: To rely on existing levels of core funding to deliver these strategies.
- 2.3 Option One is preferred because it will enhance and expedite the impact of these strategies on local residents and businesses, including providing additional support as part of the recovery from Covid-19.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 That the proposed areas of expenditure, with a total value of £5.138m and as set out at paragraph 4.5 of this report, be agreed in principle.
- 3.2 That authority be delegated to the relevant Assistant Director in consultation with the relevant Cabinet Member to finalise the detail of the programmes of work and to make minor amendments if required.
- 3.3 That authority be delegated to the relevant Assistant Director in consultation with the relevant Cabinet Member and the Cabinet Member for Finance to agree the criteria for the allocation of new loans and grants.

REASON FOR DECISION

To enable the new and extended programmes of work to commence to support the delivery of the Council's strategic objectives.

4. KEY INFORMATION

Joint Corporate Plan

- 4.1 The Council's Joint Corporate Plan sets out six strategic priorities, namely Communities, Environment, Economy, Customers, Housing and Wellbeing. These priorities are all supported by their own strategies, outcomes and delivery plans, which also include cross cutting, interdependent elements. An overview of the strategic landscape is set out below, highlighting the golden thread from the Council's vision and strategic priorities through to service plans and officers' personal objectives.

Our strategic landscape



The Focus of this Report

- 4.2 This report focuses in particular on proposals to target additional funding to enhance and expedite the impact of the Economy, Housing, Communities, Wellbeing and Leisure, Sport and Physical Activity Strategies, including providing additional support as part of the recovery from Covid-19.
- 4.3 When Council considered its General Fund Budget for 2021/22 at its meeting on 18th February 2021, it resolved to allocate an additional £4m for investment in the above strategic areas and, following cross-party input, to bring recommendations for that expenditure to Cabinet for approval. This report sets out those recommendations, which have been developed following input at all-Member workshops.

What did the feedback from the All-Members Workshops tell us we should focus on?

- 4.4 Feedback from the workshops included a desire for greater focus and investment in the areas set out below.
- Extend prevention & early intervention work.
 - Increase our focus on wellbeing and the wider determinants of health.

- Enable the provision of more local community-based sport and leisure activities and facilities.
- Build on the current Carbon Reduction Action Plan and Bio-Diversity Action Plan by: providing high quality, sustainable homes; supporting retrofit of all tenures; taking actions to increase sustainable travel; reducing littering and fly tipping; and increasing recycling.
- Enhance the economy and skills by: maximising the benefits of Gateway 14 and Freeport, including as an exemplar for innovation and a test bed for new technology and a high level skills location and low carbon site; supporting SMEs to grow and ensure quality space to move to; increasing apprenticeships; supporting the faster introduction of ultrafast broadband (1 gigabit upload and download speeds); attracting inward investment; increasing the high skills sector; ensuring that our residents have the right skills for the jobs of the future; and staying local to shop.
- Increasing the focus on community safety and anti-social behaviour, particularly in relation to prevention and support for victims.
- Build more of our own homes through the Mid Suffolk Growth Company, including highly sustainable housing projects.
- Explore how we might achieve truly affordable housing solutions across all tenures.
- Address fuel poverty and food poverty.
- Provide homeless support that goes beyond just a roof and includes, for example, support for drugs, alcohol, mental health, skills and jobs.
- Increase our focus on young people, achieving greater involvement in planning and decision making, supporting their mental health and wellbeing, increasing their aspiration, encouraging them into training and employment, providing the right facilities for sport and leisure and extending the arts & culture offer to make it relevant and accessible to this age group.
- Continue to focus on the elderly, including emphasis on supporting them to reintegrate following Covid restrictions and risk.
- Improve accessibility of services to rural communities.
- Enable a place-based and locality officer approach across the District, not just in the key towns.
- Increase support for community & voluntary sector groups to enable them to respond to new and emerging needs as a result of Covid and to retain and develop the volunteering capacity seen in the pandemic.
- Increase the focus on arts and culture, not just in the key towns, but larger villages.
- Play our part in preventing poor mental health and in supporting people to recover and rebuild resilient mental health.
- Support the development of better community facilities.

The Funding Proposals

4.5 The proposals below have a total value of £5.138m and will be funded from the following sources:

- The £4m designated for this purpose at the Council's Budget Council Meeting on 18th February 2021.
- £700k loan fund from the Growth and Efficiency Fund.
- £438k target for external match funding.

The expenditure per strategic priority is set out in the table below.

Strategic Priority	Value of funding proposals
Housing	£1.787m
Economy	£1.1m
Well-Being	£1.011m
Communities	£790k
Corporate Services	£200k
Funding for feasibility studies for strategic projects	£250k
TOTAL	£5.138m

4.6 **Details of the proposals are set out below under each of the four strategic priorities.**

4.7 In addition, there is a fifth category that:

- highlights a contribution to central services to enable them to support the work arising from these substantial expenditure proposals; and
- includes a fund to cover the cost of feasibility studies for some bigger strategic projects that require expert exploratory work to inform a business case.

4.8 It should also be noted that additional resource for the Planning Service has been considered and will be built into base budget proposals for 2022/23 onwards.

PROPOSALS RELATING TO HOUSING

Investment = £1.787 m (including £700k in recyclable loans)

Theme: Increase environmental standards in our own and others' houses

- **£150k (includes £100k loan) - Improve energy efficiency in the Private Rented Sector and reduce fuel poverty for tenants by:**
 - Increasing staff capacity to target private sector landlords/properties with the lowest EPC ratings; and
 - Creating a loan fund for landlords to bid into to fund the works.

- **£300k – Support high quality, sustainable housing by:**
 - Commissioning a feasibility study for an exemplar scheme; and
 - Creating a fund to top up initial additional costs per property for a small exemplar scheme.

Learning from this could be shared more widely with developers and those wishing to build their own homes.

Theme: Increase Housing

- **£420k (includes £300k loan) - Increase available housing by bringing more empty homes back into use by:**
 - Increasing the size of the loan fund to enable existing homeowners to do the required works; and
 - Increasing staff capacity to proactively work with empty homeowners, noting that much of the work to date has been reactive.
- **£300k (loan) - Encourage an increase in community led, affordable housing for local people by:**
 - Developing a loan fund to which Community Land Trusts can bid to help them with deposits to obtain mortgages.
- **£150k - Further support the delivery of new homes by:**
 - Adding additional staffing capacity to find sites for the Council and Mid Suffolk Growth to build new homes;
 - Exploring the feasibility of delivering serviced plots with outline planning permission for self-build/custom build on Council owned land – and if feasible pursue; and
 - Support Modern Methods of Construction (MMC) and research the costs to Housing Management of owning and managing housing stock built using these methods.

Theme: Address the Increase in Homelessness

- **£92k - Improve standards in Temporary Accommodation and further decrease void times by:**
 - Developing a set of standards for all Temporary Accommodation;
 - Inspecting all Temporary Accommodation against that standard; and
 - Employing a multi-skilled handyperson to continuously maintain standards.
- **£150k - Help more families to access safe, quality private sector accommodation and avoid homelessness by:**
 - Increasing marketing and outreach to expand the numbers of private rented properties in Mid Suffolk within the Central Suffolk Lettings Scheme; and
 - Increasing the fund available to provide cash incentives to landlords and rental top ups.
- **£100k - Increase employment and access to training of homeless people by:**
 - Commencing a targeted apprenticeship scheme for this group; and
 - Creating an Employment Advisor who would also provide additional support to remove the barriers to employment and training.

- **£50k – Increase wellbeing of homeless people by:**
 - Developing targeted social prescribing for those affected by homelessness.

Theme: Addressing the increase in Domestic Abuse

- **£75k - Further improve services for Victims of Domestic Abuse by:**
 - creating a fund to purchase a range of protections for their homes (social, private rented and owner occupied) e.g. installing alarms; fitting stronger doors/locks etc.; and
 - Increasing Domestic Abuse Support Officers.

PROPOSALS RELATING TO ECONOMY

Investment = £1.1m

Theme: Improving the Aspiration of Young People

- **£100k - Increase aspiration and inspiration amongst young people by:**
 - Running a programme of inspirational events in school holidays e.g. related to technology, STEM etc;
 - Running Young People's Enterprise Awards in 2022;
 - Hosting youth market stalls to build aspiration and enterprise skills, building upon the Innovate Local initiative; and
 - Establishing Youth Social Prescribing to support young people experiencing, for example, poor mental health, well-being, isolation or bullying challenges, to be effective learners and employees.

Theme: Increasing Innovation, Growing Businesses and Raising Skills and High Value Jobs

- **£600k - Support businesses to grow, innovate and reach new audiences by:**
 - £50k - Moving the District from superfast to ultrafast broadband (1 gigabit upload and download speeds) by surveying existing ducting in our town centres as a lever for further private sector investment;
 - £50k - Study to identify key skills gaps for high value, high growth employment;
 - £100k – Work to support the development of a business case for a new Skills and Innovation Centre at Gateway 14, with development led by needs and skills gaps;
 - £12,500 - MSDC contribution to development of the outline business case for Freeport East;
 - £100k - Targeted apprenticeships for sectors with skills gaps e.g. energy sector;
 - £100k - Partnership with University of Essex to deliver Knowledge Transfer Programmes to support small businesses to boost innovation and growth; and
 - £50k - Extending and diversifying the Innovation Hub model in Stowmarket and Eye, providing new businesses with opportunities to use pop up hubs in empty retail units or free space at market stalls. This is accompanied by a programme of mentoring as well as targeted business advice and training.

Theme: Sustainable Travel

- £100k - Increase use and accessibility of sustainable travel by:
 - Creating a fund to support the Sustainable Travel Plan currently under development.

Theme: Town Centre Vision Development

- £100k - Fund to support Town Centre Visions in Stowmarket, Needham Market and Eye.

Theme: Support for key Covid Recovery Projects and being 'bid ready'

- £200k - Feasibility and Match Funding Fund for key projects

PROPOSALS RELATING TO COMMUNITIES

Investment - £790k

Theme: Additional Support for Neighbourhood Planning and Delivery

- £80k - Increase officer support to deliver Neighbourhood Plans following adoption.
- £80k - Establish a Conservation Area Appraisal Officer post:
 - to review appraisals in collaboration with Neighbourhood Plan Groups.

Theme: Additional Grants to increase community resilience and recovery from the impact of Covid

- £250k - Establish an Emerging Needs Grant to support initiatives that arise from Neighbourhood Planning and from the Communities, Well-Being and Leisure Sport and Physical Activity Strategies, particularly where CIL isn't available.
- £100k - Establish Covid Recovery Grants for Community Groups.
- £200k - Extend the size and scope of the Communities Capital Grants Fund by:
 - Increasing the size of the existing fund; and
 - Extending the criteria to include improving accessibility and environmental credentials.
- £80k - Retain and develop the extended volunteer and skills base in local communities following Covid and address areas with lower numbers of volunteers by:
 - appointing a Volunteer Co-ordinator for Mid Suffolk either directly or through a third sector organisation.

PROPOSALS RELATING TO WELLBEING

Investment = £1.011m

Theme: Building wellbeing into Planning policy and delivery

- £120k - Embed wellbeing and social value into Planning, ensuring that these considerations are integrated into new developments by:

- increasing officer establishment with a dedicated focus on well-being.

Theme: Improving Wellbeing of Young People

- **£360k - Improve mental wellbeing, self-esteem, social skills, social connection outside school, inactivity and obesity by:**
 - Establishing a Youth Social Prescribing Scheme (for 3 years initially) in partnership with the Clinical Commissioning Groups and the voluntary and community sector.
- **£38k - Increase activity levels and reduce BMI in children of school age by:**
 - Continuing and expanding the Active Schools Programme, targeting schools with higher levels of obesity and inactivity.
- **£150k - Support young people with disabilities to achieve their potential, promote social connections and improve their physical and mental wellbeing, alongside removing barriers to inclusion, by:**
 - Developing the Choose 2 Youth Programme.
- **£30k - Continuation and expansion of School Holiday Programmes**, particularly in the half terms, when central Govt. monies aren't available.

Theme: Improve wellbeing for targeted Adult Groups

- **£128k - Increase physical agility and ability to live independently of those living with or recovering from long term conditions by:**
 - Locating Health & Wellbeing Coaches in rural communities to develop and deliver programmes to meet identified needs.
- **£30k - Increase activity levels and reduce BMI in older people by:**
 - Continuing the Active Wellbeing Programme.
- **£100k - Reduce social isolation and loneliness by:**
 - Developing a funded programme to support adult social prescribing in this targeted area.
- **£30k - Improve wellbeing and social connectivity by:**
 - Providing arts engagement outreach to rural and urban communities.
- **£25k - Improve the wellbeing of those living with Dementia and their carers by:**
 - Continuation and expansion of projects for those with dementia.

OTHER PROPOSALS

Investment = £450k

£250k - Theme: Feasibility/Exploration of the Bigger Ideas

A number of ideas have been suggested by Members which would benefit from additional funding to support further exploration of options and feasibility. These include rural transport solutions, retrofit for all tenures, truly affordable housing solutions across all tenures, exemplar housing project(s) and a garden village.

£200k - Theme: Responding to the impact of the above expenditure plans on Corporate Services

Delivery of the above projects will require additional capacity from internal corporate services to support HR functions, organisational development, programme management, performance, finance, ICT and legal costs associated with delivery.

5. LINKS TO CORPORATE PLAN

5.1 Economy, Housing, Communities and Well-Being are all key priorities in the Joint Corporate Plan and play a significant role in achieving the Council's overarching vision to build 'great communities with bright and healthy futures that everyone is proud to call home.'

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 At £5.138m, the proposals in this report exceed the £4m specifically allocated by Council at its meeting on 18th February 2021. The Assistant Director for Corporate Resources confirms that the additional £700k loan fund is available from reserves.

6.2 The criteria for new loans or grants will be finalised by Assistant Directors in consultation with the relevant Cabinet Portfolio Holder and the Cabinet Member for Finance.

6.3 Expenditure will be reported to Cabinet quarterly through the General Fund Budget Monitoring Report.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

7.1 There are no specific legal implications associated with this report, but as projects progress legal advice will be taken as required.

8. RISK MANAGEMENT

8.1 The risk in the Significant Risk Register most closely associated with this strategy is Risk 16 – Failure to achieve our vision and strategic priorities and ambitions.

Risk Description	Likelihood after mitigation	Impact after mitigation	Mitigation Measures
Failure to achieve our Vision and Strategic priorities and ambitions because: The proposals don't reflect the needs of local communities.	2 (Unlikely)	2 (Noticeable / Minor)	Data and analysis from the Suffolk Office for Data and Analytics (SODA) has been considered, including known impacts of Covid-19 on communities to date. Themed all-Member workshops have taken place on each strategic priority, enabling Members to feed in local needs. Voluntary and statutory sector partners have been involved in developing the Strategies that underpin these funding proposals.

Risk Description	Likelihood after mitigation	Impact after mitigation	Mitigation Measures
			Delivery Plans and impacts will be monitored closely and flexed to respond to changing needs.
<p>Failure to achieve our Vision and Strategic priorities and ambitions because:</p> <p>There is insufficient officer capacity to deliver the programmes associated with this expenditure.</p>	<p>2 (Unlikely)</p>	<p>2 (Noticeable / Minor)</p>	<p>Additional internal posts have been built into the proposals to ensure that there is sufficient capacity to deliver the programmes of work.</p>
<p>Failure to achieve our Vision and Strategic priorities and ambitions because:</p> <p>A significant re-escalation of impacts of Covid-19 require the Council to return to emergency response to support our communities.</p>	<p>2 (Unlikely) N.B. but a constantly changing picture that could escalate quickly.</p>	<p>3 (Bad/Serious)</p>	<p>The Council, working in partnership across Suffolk, has tried and tested processes in place that could be reactivated to respond to any escalation of Covid-19 impacts. Whilst the Council has shown itself able to operate emergency response alongside considerable continuation of business-as-usual activities, the areas covered by the scope of this report (Housing, Communities, Wellbeing and Economy) would be central to the response if emergency procedures had to be reactivated. This would be mitigated in part, but not entirely, by the additional staff posts proposed to support the funding proposals in this report.</p>
<p>Failure to achieve our Vision and Strategic priorities and ambitions because:</p> <p>Of delays in sourcing supplies.</p>	<p>3 (Probable)</p>	<p>3 (Bad/Serious)</p>	<p>The loans and grants that are part of these proposals would often be dependent on recipients being able to access appropriate supplies. Providers would be advised to place orders at the earliest opportunity and access suitable, more readily available alternatives where possible,</p>
<p>Failure to achieve our Vision and Strategic priorities and ambitions because:</p> <p>The £438k target for external funding, referred to at</p>	<p>2 (Unlikely)</p>	<p>2 (Noticeable / Minor)</p>	<p>The success of external funding will be monitored on a monthly basis and reported to the Cabinet Member for Finance and the relevant Cabinet Members for Housing, Economy, Communities and Wellbeing. Any additional financial or other proposals or adjustments deemed necessary will be reviewed in the regular</p>

Risk Description	Likelihood after mitigation	Impact after mitigation	Mitigation Measures
paragraph 4.5 of this report, is not achieved.			dialogue with these Cabinet Members.

9. CONSULTATIONS

- 9.1 Engagement has taken place as part of All-Member Workshops and Councillors, Officers and Partners have all been involved in developing the Strategies that underpin these funding proposals.

10. EQUALITY ANALYSIS

- 10.1 There are no equality and diversity implications arising directly from this report. Equality Impact Screening Assessments, and if necessary, full Equality Impact Assessments will be carried out on the projects and programmes that will be delivered using these funds.
- 10.2 All four strategic priorities within the scope of this report contribute to reducing health and social inequalities.

11. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 There are positive environmental implications arising from the recommendations in this report. Examples include proposals to further support sustainable travel initiatives, to improve energy efficiency in the Private Rented Sector through a loan scheme, to increase the sustainability of community facilities through a grant scheme, to develop a high quality, sustainable housing scheme and to carry out further feasibility work on how to further extend retrofit of all tenures.
- 11.2 *In addition* to funded proposals in this report that support environmental sustainability, the Council has a separate earmarked Reserve to deliver key elements of its Carbon Reduction Management Plan and Bio-Diversity Action Plan.

12. Measuring and reporting on Progress

The progress and effectiveness of the strategy will be tracked in a number of ways:

- 12.1 Detailed measures of success will be drawn up as part of a new outcomes and performance framework currently being developed to support the Councils' Corporate Plan.
- 12.2 The Economy, Housing and Communities & Well-Being Officer Programme Boards will oversee progress, in detail, against the Delivery Plans and strategic outcomes.
- 12.3 Performance will be reported quarterly to Cabinet.
- 12.4 Progress against financial expenditure will be reported quarterly to Cabinet.
- 12.5 Progress against the projects will be reported at All Member briefings.

13. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

- 13.1 Paper MC/20/24 'General Fund Budget 2021/22 and Four-Year Outlook Mid Suffolk Report and associated minute – Council 18/02/21