

MID SUFFOLK DISTRICT COUNCIL

TO: MSDC Cabinet	REPORT NUMBER: MCa/22/4
FROM: Cabinet Member for Housing: Cllr. Lavinia Hadingham and Cabinet Member for Communities: Cllr. Julie Flatman	DATE OF MEETING: 6 June 2022
OFFICER: Assistant Director for Housing, Gavin Fisk, Corporate Manager for Communities, Vicky Moseley	KEY DECISION REF NO. CAB356

STOWMARKET LCA – OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS.

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To respond to the recommendation from the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 20th September 2021 that urgent action is taken, to build improved joined up working between the Housing Directorate and Citizens Advice, as a top priority and that consideration is given to creating a jointly funded post by Cabinet, in order to move this priority and critical area forward.
- 1.2 To respond to the recommendations from the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 20th December 2021 that resolved:
- a) To thank the Local Citizens Advice (LCA) Chief officers and their respective staff for the work that they have carried out in the last year. Particularly during the pandemic.
 - b) The Committee are reassured that both LCAs are operating effectively and efficiently and responded well to all questioning from members.
 - c) That the Councils take a single view of debt and implement an integrated system for dealing with housing rent and council tax debt.
 - d) That contact be made with foodbanks with a request that their clients are referred to the LCA for advice on nutrition and budgeting and cookery skills classes.
 - e) Remote virtual operation capability for LCA and other bodies should be provided on an accelerated programme as a matter of urgency, defining locations, IT equipment and applications, training and connectivity.
 - f) That Cabinets be asked to consider the previous resolution of Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee that the 3 year rolling funding arrangements review be subject to indexation on an annual review basis.

- g) That the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee review the LCAs in December 2022.

2. OPTIONS CONSIDERED

Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 20th September 2021

- 2.1 Given the emerging cost of living crisis and the impact on residents, to create a jointly funded post to improve system connectivity between Citizens Advice Bureau, Mid Suffolk District Council and wider partners.
- 2.2 To not create a jointly funded post to improve joined up working between Citizens Advice Bureau and Mid Suffolk Council and partners, instead rely on existing relationships and work together effectively through the mechanisms that are already in place.
- 2.3 To reject the option of a dedicated officer being appointed to solely support and improve the existing working relationship between Stowmarket LCA and Mid Suffolk's Housing Service but instead support the Council's proposed Cost of Living 5 Point Plan and support the appointment of a Cost of Living Co-ordinator to maximise partnership working and established systems to provide targeted support in localities where there is a particular trend and need, implementing a 'family first approach'.

Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 20th December 2021

- 2.4 To accept or reject recommendations that:
- The Councils take a single view of debt and implement an integrated system for dealing with housing rent, and council tax debt.
 - Contact be made to foodbanks with a request that their clients are referred to the LCA for advice on nutrition and budgeting and cookery skills classes.
 - Remote virtual operation capability for LCA and other bodies should be provided on an accelerated programme as a matter of urgency, defining locations, IT equipment and applications, training and connectivity
- 2.5 The councils proposed Cost of Living 5 Point Plan and appointment of a dedicated Cost of Living Co-ordinator will address each of the recommendations above and will work to maximise partnership working and established systems to provide targeted support in localities where there is a particular trend and need.
- 2.6 To accept or reject the recommendation that the 3-year rolling funding arrangement in place for Mid Suffolk CA be subject to indexation on an annual review basis.

3. RECOMMENDATION

- 3.1 That Cabinet considers the report from Joint Overview and Scrutiny and agrees their response to the recommendations in the report as detailed in paragraph 4, in line with the Council's response to the Cost of Living Crisis and the five point plan that

will look at a better system of connectivity between partners, including the LCA, the Council and system wide partners.

REASON FOR DECISION

To respond to the recommendations in the report from the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

4. KEY INFORMATION

- 4.1 At Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 20th September 2021 a review of the Homes and Housing Strategy was conducted.
- 4.2 A recommendation for Mid Suffolk Cabinet was proposed and agreed, which said “In relation to action point 3.13, This Committee (MSDC) recommends that urgent action is taken to build improved joined up working with Citizens Advice & recommends that this is a top priority. Furthermore, that consideration is given to creating a jointly funded post by Cabinet in order to move this priority and critical area forward.”
- 4.3 Action 3.13 in the Homes and Housing Strategy Delivery Plan is: “Build relationships with local Citizens Advice to agree a protocol for joined up working to support individuals and families experiencing complex housing difficulties.”
- 4.4 At a further Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 20th December 2021, a review of the Annual work programme of Sudbury and District and Mid Suffolk LCA was conducted.
- 4.5 The recommendations for Mid Suffolk Cabinet proposed and agreed included:

Recommendation	Response
The Councils take a single view of debt and implement an integrated system for dealing with housing rent, and council tax debt.	Officers have been working with LCAs at locality level and are looking to appoint a specific post that will focus on cost of living – titled Cost of Living Co-ordinator. This post will build on the excellent operations we already have in place, including customer services, housing and welfare support, external partnerships etc to ensure that all systems talk to each other in meeting the needs of people. This work will be developed further as part of the delivery of the Cost of Living 5 Point Plan elsewhere on the agenda for today’s Cabinet meeting.
That contact be made to foodbanks with a request that their clients are referred to the LCA for advice on nutrition and budgeting and cookery skills classes	Officers work closely with Foodbanks at District level but also as part of wider system activity. Officers encourage Foodbanks to link in with LCAs regularly and recent reports prepared by Community Action Suffolk show that a significant number of referrals to

	Foodbanks are made by LCAs. Further work has also taken place and will continue to take place to ensure that Foodbanks signpost and offer additional advice where needed.
Remote virtual operation capability for LCA and other bodies should be provided on an accelerated programme as a matter of urgency defining locations, IT equipment and applications, training, and connectivity.	This piece of work has also been identified as part of the cost of living action plan. At present Suffolk County are building shared devices, which will then be tested in locations identified through the data scoping exercise, described within the plan. Initial conversations have taken place with Suffolk libraries as possible host locations for some of the devices. Once the locations have been agreed, through the data scoping exercise taking place in the summer, this approach can be scoped out and agreed with cabinet members.
That Cabinets be asked to consider the previous resolution of Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee that the 3 year rolling funding arrangements review be subject to indexation on an annual review basis.	A rolling three-year funding agreement is in place with Citizens Advice Mid Suffolk. Whether the 3 year funding agreement will be subject to indexation in future years is still to be decided. However, the work developed in the Cost of Living 5 point Plan and additional support already provided by Mid-Suffolk to provide an additional uplift to their revenue grant for 2022/23 is a more informed way of providing ongoing support. The Suffolk Public Sector Leaders have agreed to underwrite £1m of hardship funding across the county, which is also expected to provide direct support to LCAs and the Local Welfare Assistance Service.
That the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee review the LCAs in December 2022	The annual review of LCAs is already part of the Joint Scrutiny Committee's annual work programme.

- 4.6 The vital relationship between the LCA and Mid Suffolk District Council is recognised, hence its inclusion within the Homes and Housing Strategy Delivery Plan and established rolling three-year revenue grant agreement. Housing issues may be only one of multiple issues the LCA may be working with a household to resolve and so a holistic approach to problem solving is only possible where there is a strong working relationship between the LCA and the Council.
- 4.7 Teams across the Council in general have a good working relationship with the LCA and where improvements need to be made these are discussed via regular meetings.

Further means of communication has also been offered to ensure that LCA can always contact a member of the Housing Solutions Team.

- 4.8 Mid Suffolk District Council and LCA are part of the Suffolk Information Partnership (SIP). This allows customers' personal information to be shared between partner organisations via referrals, so individuals can get the help they need. Further mechanisms for increasing integrated working are currently being explored.
- 4.9 Dialogue between the Council and the LCAs has included the need for:
- A resource to better co-ordinate and connect established systems through a multi-agency case work partnership; and
 - Better intelligence gathering that enables the potential deployment of "pop up" services where there is a need.
- 4.10 Supporting people that are impacted by the emerging crisis to access a wide range of opportunities to maintain resilience, health and wellbeing will prevent people from falling into crisis and support people's mental health, which was the principal recommendation in the Director of Public Health's annual report.
- 4.11 There are already mechanisms in place for the LCA and MSDC to work together, and this will be further built upon. The proposed Cost of Living Co-ordinator, if approved as part of the 5 Point Plan, will ensure that partners continue to work together effectively and will build on the existing relationships and systems formed.
- 4.12 If approved, the Cost of Living 5 Point Plan will address the recommendations of the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee made at both the 20th September 2021 and 20th December 2021 meetings.

5. LINKS TO CORPORATE PLAN

- 5.1 The provision of advice and assistance by the Citizen's Advice Bureau is strengthened by effective working relationships between the LCA and Mid Suffolk District Council and aligns with both the vision set out in the:
- Homes and Housing Strategy (2019) that everyone should have a suitable home, which enables them to build settled, safe and healthy lives within sustainable and thriving communities.
 - Wellbeing Strategy (2021) that the residents of Mid Suffolk have the best possible conditions for good wellbeing and have lives that are healthy, happy and rewarding.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The £60K identified to fund the Cost of Living Coordinator on a fixed term contract will be ringfenced specifically for this project from funding provided by the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. There will be no additional cost to the council

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 None.

8. RISK MANAGEMENT

8.1

Risk Description	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigation Measures
The impacts of the Cost of Living Crisis reduces the overall wellbeing and resilience of our communities.	High	High	Maximise partnership working and established systems to provide targeted support in localities where there is a particular trend and need, implementing a targeted family-first approach. Appointment of a dedicated officer to co-ordinate work and maintain strong partnership arrangements.

9. CONSULTATIONS

9.1 Due to many of the responses being further wrapped up in the proposed Cost of Living 5 Point Plan, many of the issues raised in this paper have been discussed more broadly at all member briefings and with cabinet members, internal teams and partner organisations.

10. EQUALITY ANALYSIS

10.1 Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) not required.

11. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

11.1 There are no environmental implications in this report.

12. APPENDICES

Title	Location
(a) Babergh Mid Suffolk District Council Joint Homes and Housing Strategy 2019 – 2024.	https://www.babergh.gov.uk/assets/Housing-and-Homelessness/Housing-Strategy/Home-Housing-Strategy-Final-21032019-.pdf

(b) Babergh Mid Suffolk District Council Joint Wellbeing Strategy 2021 - 2027	Microsoft Word - Wellbeing Strategy 2021-27.docx (midsuffolk.gov.uk)

13. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

13.1 None.

14. REPORT AUTHORS

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