

MID SUFFOLK DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of the **MID SUFFOLK COUNCIL** held in the King Edmund Chamber, Endeavour House, 8 Russell Road, Ipswich on Thursday, 23 June 2022

PRESENT:

Councillor: James Caston (Chairman)
Paul Ekpenyong (Vice-Chair)

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| Councillors: | Oliver Amorowson | Gerard Brewster |
| | David Burn | Terence Carter |
| | Austin Davies | Rachel Eburne |
| | John Field | Julie Flatman |
| | Jessica Fleming | Dr Helen Geake |
| | Peter Gould | Kathie Guthrie |
| | Lavinia Hadingham | Matthew Hicks |
| | Barry Humphreys MBE | Sarah Mansel |
| | John Matthissen | Andrew Mellen |
| | Suzie Morley | David Muller |
| | Mike Norris | Penny Otton |
| | Timothy Passmore | Harry Richardson |
| | Keith Scarff | Andrew Stringer |
| | Rowland Warboys | Keith Welham |
| | John Whitehead | |

In attendance:

Officers: Chief Executive (AC)
Monitoring Officer (EY)
Corporate Manager – Governance & Civic Office (JR)
Assistant Director – Housing (GF)
Assistant Director – Environment & Commercial (CC)
Assistant Director – Economic Development and Regeneration (FD)

Apologies:

Richard Meyer
Stephen Phillips
Dr Daniel Pratt

15 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS BY COUNCILLORS

- 15.1 The Monitoring Officer advised that as Members of Suffolk County Council and Stowmarket Town Council were likely to have another non-registerable interest in respect of Item 12 – Stowmarket, Health, Education and Leisure Facilities (SHELF) - dispensation had been granted to allow those Members to debate and vote on the item.
- 15.2 Councillor Mansel declared another non-registerable interest in respect of Item 12 – Stowmarket, Health, Education and Leisure Facilities (SHELF) - as a Member of The Stakeholder Forum, and as a Director of Chilton Fields Parkrun.

15.3 The Monitoring Officer confirmed that Councillor Mansel would be required to leave the room for the duration of Item 12.

16 MC/22/5 TO CONFIRM THE MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL MEETING HELD ON 26 MAY 2022

It was RESOLVED:-

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 26 May 2022 be confirmed and signed as a true record.

17 MC/22/6 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

17.1 The Chairman referred to Paper MC/22/6 and advised Members that in addition to the events detailed, the Vice Chair had visited Wood Ley Community Primary School on 16 June 2022 to celebrate them becoming the first School of Sanctuary in Suffolk.

18 LEADER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

18.1 The Chairman invited the Leader to make her announcements.

The Leader advised that she wanted to keep her announcements as brief as possible to ensure that Members had time to discuss and debate the two significant papers on the agenda.

With regard to the future of council housing in Mid Suffolk, the Leader stated that there surely cannot be a more important time - in the middle of a cost of living crisis – for the Council to be confirming how we are going to ensure we provide truly affordable, safe, warm, environmentally friendly homes for those families and individuals who are most in need in Mid Suffolk.

She then spoke about the amazing opportunity to create a holistic wellbeing hub - which would bring together education, sport, leisure and health facilities and commented that this would be a facility not just for Stowmarket but for residents and communities from across the district.

The Leader commented on the current community engagement in relation to the Parking Strategy, advising that drop in events would be happening in Thurston, Woolpit, Stowmarket, Needham Market, Great Blakenham, Debenham, and Eye. An online survey will be open on 31 July with paper copies available by telephone request.

As Councillor Fleming said in launching the consultation, the Councils' aim is to have a parking strategy that is fit for the future, and must ensure shoppers, tourists, visitors, residents, workers, and commuters have access to sufficient, good quality, safe, welcoming and easy-to-use parking.

The parking strategy aims to reflect both the need for private vehicle parking and the Councils' climate change ambitions, and support more sustainable transport options such as buses, trains, and cycling, to connect our communities.

The Leader reminded Members of the new Annual Residents survey. The fieldwork for the survey began this month and will last for 2 months. The results of this survey will enable the Council to measure some of its short-term outcomes such as resident satisfaction, feeling informed, influence, communication preferences, personal wellbeing, community resilience, and feelings of safety across Mid Suffolk.

She went on to say that the report is yet to be considered at Overview & Scrutiny Committee, which will be happening on Monday, but as the papers had been published, she wanted to take the opportunity to personally thank the Directors of CIFCO. The report going to Overview & Scrutiny confirms that CIFCO generated £3.75m in net income for Mid Suffolk and Babergh last year, which of course enables us to continue to deliver and improve services for our residents without resorting to increases in taxes or charges.

The Leader finished with three further thank yous. Firstly, she thanked Councillor Brewster who has stepped away from the role as Deputy Leader, and expressed her gratitude for his constant, reassuring support over the last 3 years. Councillor Richardson has agreed to take on the role of Deputy Leader.

She then thanked Gavin Fisk, the Assistant Director for Housing, and Cassandra Clements, the Assistant Director for Environment and Commercial Partnerships, who will both be leaving the Council in July, and wished them the best for the future.

The Chairman thanked the Leader for her announcements.

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

19.1 None received.

20 QUESTIONS BY THE PUBLIC IN ACCORDANCE WITH COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULES

20.1 None received.

21 QUESTIONS BY COUNCILLORS IN ACCORDANCE WITH COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULES

Question 1 Councillor Otton to Councillor Whitehead, Cabinet Member for Finance

I am very concerned that approximately 8000 Mid Suffolk residents still have not received their £150 energy grant; what is the council doing to make sure they are able to receive this money and avoid having to use pawn brokers or similar financial organisations that charge a fee?

Response from Councillor Whitehead, Cabinet Member for Finance

As at 17 June this year, the Council had paid out £4.2M to 28,273 households. This is around 82% of those identified as potentially eligible. The majority of these council tax payers pay their council tax by direct debit and have been paid. Those remaining are either where there is a mismatch between the account name and the bank account name, or the first direct debit is still to be collected for council tax which is part of the pre-payment assurance. Those cases where there has been a mismatch, which the Council has been unable to resolve, will be written to this week. For those 6,741 who still do not pay their council tax by direct debit, a letter was issued on 10 June. The letter signposted to a secure online form where there are two options; either to provide bank details so that the Councils can credit the £150 to a bank account, or elect to have the money payable to their council tax accounts reducing future payments. A three week window was given for completion of this form. At the end of the three week window any council tax payer who has not completed the form will have the £150 allocated in full to their council tax account. As at 19 June, 46% of caseload have completed the form.

Supplementary Question

Will Mid Suffolk be involved in establishing the criteria and the mechanisms for assessing the upcoming government hardship funds and energy grants?

Response from Councillor Whitehead

My understanding from general reading is that the future rebates are going onto either electric or gas accounts and I think this will be cause some for confusion for people who use oil for example rather than gas accounts will be paid but it's something which is being looked at very closely at the moment.

The Chief Executive advised that the District Councils would not be involved in these payments.

Question 2 Councillor Davies to Councillor Burn, Cabinet Member for Planning

Why can't CIL funds be used for feasibility studies for community infrastructure projects?

Response from Councillor Burn, Cabinet Member for Planning

There has been a cross-party, cross-Council, Member working group ever since CIL expenditure first started in 2018 (following the introduction of CIL in 2016). This Member Panel has developed the CIL Expenditure Framework, which Council has adopted.

It has been revised each year since 2018 and indeed has been meeting in June this year to agree a revised CIL Expenditure Framework, which will come to Council in July.

It has long been the view of the member group that CIL funds should be spent on the infrastructure itself, which is also required by the legislation, not on feasibility studies for community-led projects. Of course, in many communities where development has occurred, those Parish Councils receive Neighbourhood CIL themselves, which they can use to develop projects through the feasibility stage ahead of making a bid to the Councils CIL funds. There is also an opportunity for Parishes to receive support through our Community grants system and together with the prospect of other external funding, Parishes and other local community projects enjoy the potential of different funding streams to support their feasibility studies and start-up costs for their infrastructure projects.

The Member Working Group includes myself, Councillors Mansel and Field, as well as Councillor Brewster so if you would like a more detailed discussion with any of us, or indeed with Christine Thurlow who leads on CIL from an officer perspective, then I'm sure any of us would be happy to talk.

Supplementary question

Why have CIL funds been used to pay for feasibility studies to Network Rail on two occasions at the same site.

Response from Councillor Burn

I would need to look into that to give you a proper response. If you wouldn't mind giving me some time I will get back to you.

Question 3 Councillor Mellen to Councillor Flatman, Cabinet Member for Communities

What progress has been made on the electric bus project which was agreed earlier this year?

Response from Councillor Flatman, Cabinet Member for Communities

Following a discussion with my fellow Cabinet Members regarding the research and development which has taken place so far in respect of the electric bus funding project, we would like to invite all Councillors to a briefing about our steer to Officers so far and our planned approach to decision making including the formation of a cross party working group. Councillors will receive an invitation to this meeting later this week. In addition, we have an intern in place for the summer who is tasked with and has commenced evidence gathering specifically in respect of other regional and national schemes and their short and long-term viability and sustainability.

Supplementary question

Since the main limiting factor in getting this project started is the long lead time for delivery of an electric bus should we not quickly decide which model to choose and get one ordered?

Response from Councillor Flatman

There will be a lot of viability studies and a lot to decide on. If you are a County Councillor, you will know that the County are leading in a pilot at the moment on Catch and they have extended this pilot to December and I think we would be absolutely mad to go down a road that we may have answered for us as well.

22 MC/22/7 THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT BUSINESS PLAN

- 22.1 Councillor Hadingham introduced paper MC/22/7 and proposed the recommendations detailed in the report.
- 22.2 Councillor Eburne commented on the hard work which had been put into the development of the plan. Councillor Eburne enquired whether the intention was to move the housing stock from social rent to affordable rent which would be more expensive, and requested more information with regard to the seven scenarios referred to in the report.
- 22.3 The Assistant Director for Housing confirmed that there was no plan to move from social rent at this time and provided additional details of the scenarios referred to in the report. The Assistant Director advised Members that the plan would be an ongoing process and would be reviewed and developed regularly.
- 22.4 Councillor Scarff referred to scenario two detailed in the report and asked how ambitious the Council would be in seeking opportunities to achieve grant funding from central government to decarbonise the existing housing stock.
- 22.5 The Assistant Director for Housing advised that the Council had been successful in applying for grants through the Suffolk Climate Change Partnership, and work with the Energy Saving Trust has provided clear data regarding the current housing stock which will ensure the Council is well placed to apply for funding opportunities.
- 22.6 In response to a question from Councillor Field regarding benchmarking data relating to void properties, the Assistant Director for Housing advised that the Council has recently joined the data comparison provider Housemark and provided details of the data collected which is currently being validated and scrutinised.
- 22.7 The Assistant Director for Housing responded to a further question from Councillor Field regarding possible rent increases and commented that this would be a decision which would need to be made over the course of the budget setting process.

- 22.8 Councillor Stringer asked why the issues of minimum space standards, access to public transport services, and wider benefits to the community within in the built form and uses had been identified as issues to aspire to and not which will be done. The Assistant Director for Assets and Investments advised that the details of each situation had to be considered and this would mean a degree of flexibility would be required when considering housing delivery.
- 22.9 Councillor Geake queried the graph on page 40 of the report and asked why there was a future reduction in the number of social units in the stock figure. The Assistant Director for Housing explained that the graph allowed for future sales of council housing but did not allow for stock being built and therefore showed an overall reduction.
- 22.10 The Assistant Director for Housing went on to outline the various tenant satisfaction surveys being undertaken and the work which would be carried out as a result of these.
- 22.11 In response to a question from Councillor Mellen, the Assistant Manager – Strategic Properties provided clarification that the approach to building would be a fabric first approach to build properties which are energy efficient and less costly to tenants.
- 22.12 Councillor Mansel stated that it appeared that the number of social housing rents were diminishing while the number of shared ownership and affordable rent properties were increasing.
- 22.13 The Assistant Director for Housing stated that right to buy would affect the number of social housing rents, but officers would explore as many opportunities to build as many social rents as possible.
- 22.14 Councillor Whitehead commented that replacing right to buy properties was important financially to prevent having the same management costs on a smaller base.
- 22.15 Councillor Matthissen asked how the turnover of housing staff and vacancy levels were being controlled.
- 22.16 The Chief Executive replied that it was not possible to control but was being managed and he would circulate accurate vacancy rates outside of the meeting.
- 22.17 Councillor Eburne commented that the Neighbourhood Planning Team needed to be increased.
- 22.18 Councillor Carter asked how best quality housing could be ensured and what would happen with properties that could not be improved.
- 22.19 The Assistant Director – Housing stated that properties were assessed on a case-by-case basis.

23 MC/22/8 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT 2021/22

- 23.1 The Chair invited Councillor Welham to introduce paper MC/22/8.
- 23.2 Councillor Scarff sought assurance that should the issues with the membership of the Babergh Overview and Scrutiny Committee continue, it would not affect the Mid Suffolk Overview and Scrutiny Committee to conduct business.
- 23.3 Councillor Welham assured the Council that while there would continue to be Joint Overview and Scrutiny meetings this would not prevent the Mid Suffolk Overview and Scrutiny Committee from meeting separately if needed.

24 MC/22/9 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PLAN 2022/23

- 24.1 The Chair invited Councillor Welham to introduce paper MC/22/9.
- 24.2 Councillor Eburne asked when the next meeting for the task and finish group on transport was due to meet and whether the scrutiny of the budget process should be brought forward from January.
- 24.3 Councillor Welham stated that the task and finish group had produced a draft final report and needed one more meeting to complete their work and then present it to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- 24.5 Councillor Mellen asked if there were any plans to scrutinise the Council's holding companies.
- 24.6 Councillor Welham agreed that this needed to be scrutinised either by Overview and Scrutiny or Joint Audit and Standards.

25 MC/22/10 STOWMARKET, HEALTH, EDUCATION AND LEISURE FACILITIES (SHELF)

Councillor Mansel left the room at 18.54pm

- 25.1 The Chair invited Councillor Richardson to introduce paper MC/22/10
- 25.2 Councillor Amorowson asked if Chilton Field would remain open to the public and why the athletics track was not a full size track.
- 25.3 Councillor Richardson confirmed that Chilton Fields would remain open to the public and the Assistant Director – Economic Development and Regeneration stated that the National Athletics body suggested a mini athletics track.
- 25.4 Councillor Passmore enquired when the facilities would come to fruition.
- 25.5 The Assistant Director – Economic Development and Regeneration stated that it was hoped that the sporting facilities would be available by 2025.

- 25.6 Councillor Eburne asked if villages neighbouring Stowmarket would be included in future consultations.
- 25.7 Councillor Richardson stated that the planned engagement over the next couple of months would include opportunities for everyone to be involved including Stowmarket's neighbouring villages.
- 25.8 Councillor Ekpenyong asked for assurance that sporting organisations other than those already on site would have unhindered access to the facilities.
- 25.9 Councillor Richardson replied that access to the facilities would be formed as part of the governance arrangements and the details would be part of the full business case.
- 25.10 In response to a question from Councillor Warboys regarding consultation with stakeholders, the Assistant Director – Economic Development and Regeneration stated that a stakeholders forum was established 9 months ago, the forum had a range of sporting clubs and national sporting bodies who had helped to design the master plan.
- 25.11 In response to Councillor Welham's questions regarding facilities for sports not currently catered for in the area and public transport to the sites, Councillor Richardson replied that the facilities being suggested can be used for multiple sports including some less popular sports and that an advantage of the suggested sites are they are in the areas largest town which has good commuter links both by rail and bus.
- 25.12 Councillors debated issues within the report including connectivity to Stowmarket Town Centre and the railway station, consultation with neighbouring villages, the possibility of improving the existing leisure centre and facilities for disabled sports.
- 25.13 Councillor Richardson thanked Councillors for their comments and for championing sports provisions within the district.

By a unanimous vote it was **RESOLVED:-**

- 1.1 That Council notes Cabinets' approval of the Masterplan (appendix a), and initial Business case (appendix b - restricted) for the proposed scheme which includes an indicative cost plan and funding strategy**
- 1.2 That Council notes the work to date on the partnership strategy (appendix e - restricted) and future management models (appendix d – restricted) for the new scheme.**
- 1.3 That Council approve the funding of £700,000 (as outlined in 6.2) to complete detailed design stage and submission of a planning application, next stage of operational management modelling and to appoint a partnership co-ordinator to fully maximise current and future partnership working and collaboration across the site, outlined in 6.4.**

- 1.4 That a Member advisory working group be created for the development of the scheme that includes relevant Cabinet Members and local Ward Members.

26 COUNCILLOR APPOINTMENTS

- 26.1 There were no Councillor appointments.

27 MOTIONS ON NOTICE

- 27.1 None received.

The business of the meeting was concluded at 7.55pm

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Chair