

## MID SUFFOLK DISTRICT COUNCIL

<b>TO:</b> Council	<b>REPORT NUMBER:</b> <b>MC/22/19</b>
<b>FROM:</b> Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee	<b>DATE OF MEETING:</b> 27 October 2022

### OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE REPORT TO MID SUFFOLK DISTRICT COUNCIL

#### 1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update Mid Suffolk District Council on the business conducted at the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 27<sup>th</sup> June 2022 and 30<sup>th</sup> September 2022.

#### 2. RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 This report is for noting.

#### 3. KEY INFORMATION

- 3.1 The Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee met on 27<sup>th</sup> June 2022 and considered the following items:

##### 3.1.1 CAPITAL INVESTMENT FUND COMPANY ('CIFCO CAPITAL LTD') BUSINESS TRADING AND PERFORMANCE REPORT

Councillor David Busby, Babergh Cabinet Member for Assets and Investments, introduced the report to the Committee, including outlining that the value of the portfolio had risen over the previous year, that there had been greater investment in improving sustainability of the properties within the portfolio, and that the councils had received £3.75 million in income over the previous year.

The Director - Assets and Investments and Christopher Haworth presented a summary of the Business Plan to Members.

In response to a question about the effects of the pandemic, and whether the balance of assets within the portfolio is still appropriate, it was explained that, whilst the retail sector had struggled, retail warehousing had seen a rise in demand and there had still been a demand for office space, despite the rise in working from home.

A query about arrears was raised. The Director for Assets and Investment responded that tenant engagement had been the most effective method when dealing with arrears, as it gave reminders to the tenant and allowed for the set-up of payment plans where necessary. In cases where this had not worked other methods, such as bailiffs, had been used.

In response to a query about using grants and additional funding for sustainability updates, the Director responded that where possible external funding would be used, options such as solar panels that gave a return would also be considered.

There were a number of questions regarding improvements to EPC (Energy Performance Certificate) ratings of properties and how these would be achieved, whether tenants' needs were considered during the improvement process, and whether there were short term targets ahead of the 2027 goal. The Director responded to these questions stating that there was currently £50,000 allocated in the budgets for improvements and, when tenants carried out their own refurbishments, suggestions were made by CIFCO on ways that sustainability could be improved. Additionally, EPC assessors took tenants' needs into account when suggesting improvements. However, whilst there were no intermediate targets for improvements, progress would be monitored annually.

Members debated the Business Plan and whether the Business Plan should continue to be reported to Full Council following scrutiny by the Committee, or whether the Committee should only refer the Business Plan to Full Council if they were not satisfied with the performance.

**It was RESOLVED:**

**That the Joint Overview and Scrutiny committee notes the CIFCO Business Plan and Business Trading and Performance and ask that the minutes of this meeting be taken into account at Full Council.**

**That the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee is satisfied that the CIFCO Business Plan and Business Trading and Performance is robust for 2022 – 2023.**

**That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee recommend to Full Council that future CIFCO business plans continue to be scrutinised by the Councils' Joint Overview & Scrutiny Committee and then reported to Council.**

**That the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee agrees that the current performance of CIFCO delivers good value to the Councils; the KPIs are appropriate measures of performance; the business plan is robust and appropriate for the next 12 months; and there is sufficient confidence in the management of CIFCO.**

3.2 The Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee met on 30<sup>th</sup> September 2022 and considered the following items:

**3.2.1 BABERGH AND MID SUFFOLK DISTRICT COUNCILS PARKING STRATEGY**

Councillor Davis left the room as he had previously been involved in the Strategy creation through his previous position on the Babergh Cabinet.

The item was introduced by Councillor Fleming as the Cabinet Member for Environment at Mid Suffolk District Council. She was supported by the Director of Environment and Commercial Partnerships and the Parking Services Manager.

This is the first Parking Strategy for the Councils and involved considerable public consultation with significant levels of particularly online responses. The Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee welcomed the Parking Strategy and made the following comments:

Members expressed concern over the uncertainty in predicting parking capacity and expressed the need to update predictions of car use and car park use as the project moves into the implementation phase.

There were queries over the governance of parking strategy implementation and a request that the business case for the implementation plan be made available for scrutiny at an appropriate time. Also, Information Bulletins at key stages of the implementation phase.

The collected data shows that some 40 -50% of journeys to a car park are 1.5 miles or less. The strategy needs to encourage implementation of proposals to discourage car use by providing opportunities for journeys to be undertaken by other means. This will involve working with partners, including SCC and the Sustainable Travel Officer.

Members asked why there was no data on problem areas and suggested producing a heat map showing reported instances of enforcement and issuing of penalty charge notices in hot spot areas. Emphasis needs to be on trip reduction, not increasing the number of car parking spaces.

The strategy seems to accept that spend in town centres increases when on street parking is permitted. Officers should be asked to review case studies conducted in towns where the reverse has been shown to be the case.

Members expressed concern about the lack of flexibility in the strategy - data was collected before the sharp increase in fuel prices and the cost of living crisis.

Transport to school often leads to on street parking. A strategy for reducing the problems caused by parent parking needs to be developed, probably with SCC.

Members suggested that work is needed to investigate the (often unsatisfactory) parking of vehicles for car and van sharing, particularly along the A14 corridor.

Members agreed that the strategy has a limited scope as most car parking spaces are under the control of others, especially on street parking.

Most areas appear to have been covered in the formation of this Strategy but the real test will come with the drafting of the implementation plan.

By a unanimous vote

**It was RESOLVED:**

**That the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee note the content of the report and that a verbal presentation of the comments made at this meeting be provided to Cabinet**

**That Cabinet is requested to carry out further work to replace carparking demands with alternatives by looking at other areas that have done so successfully.**

**That the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee asks that a report be provided to the Committee in due course to review the progress on the Parking strategy implementation plan.**

### **3.2.2 SHARED REVENUES PARTNERSHIP – COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION SCHEME**

Members considered three options for amending the Council Tax Reduction (Working Age) Scheme, and a fourth option - to retain the current scheme.

#### **Option 1**

Renew the existing scheme and allow an up to 100% maximum reduction for all households.

#### **Option 2**

Renew the existing scheme and allow an up to 100% maximum reduction for all legacy benefit households and introduce a simplified scheme for households in receipt of Universal Credit (UC).

#### **Option 3**

Renew the existing scheme and allow an up to 100% maximum reduction for all legacy benefit households and introduce a simplified scheme for households in receipt of Universal Credit. And introduce a transitional protection scheme to support those households who could be worse off with option 2.

#### **Option 4**

Continue with the current scheme.

It was explained that under the current scheme households could be subject to monthly means testing as their UC payments change. As the UC caseload increases, the workload could become unmanageable without increasing resources. It is often those households who are least able to pay which are subject to frequent means testing. Each change in UC could be followed by a revised council tax demand. If payment is not made, arrears can build up and may never be cleared.

Members agreed that to continue with the current scheme is not sustainable. Committee then considered the three options and, after debate, agreed the recommended option 3.

By a unanimous vote

**It was RESOLVED:**

**That the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee recommends to Cabinet Option 3 as the preferred option for the Consultation for the Council Tax Reduction (Working Age) Scheme.**

### **3.2.3 INFORMATION BULLETIN – SHARED LEGAL SERVICE PERFORMANCE MONITORING AND SPLIT OF NEW LEGAL MATTERS**

The committee received an Information Bulletin giving data around the number of instructions received from Babergh, Mid Suffolk and West Suffolk, and the complexity of matters dealt with. Historical data, trends and recharge mechanisms were presented and explained. Members were satisfied that suitable performance monitoring measures are in place.

The report was for noting.

### **3.2.4 RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE JOINT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY TASK AND FINISH GROUP FOR RURAL TRANSPORT**

The Chair of the Task and Finish Group presented his report on the work of the group. He explained that since the group commenced its review Mid Suffolk had commenced work on acquiring two electric minibuses and a working group had been set up to consider options for using the vehicles to improve the access to public transport in the District.

Babergh Members did not consider that a similar project in their district can be recommended at this time. Separate recommendations for each of the districts were debated and agreed.

There was overall agreement that the Community Transport providers across the two districts provide a valuable service but that the service is not well promoted.

**It was RESOLVED:**

**That Mid Suffolk Overview and Scrutiny Committee recommend to Mid Suffolk Cabinet that, as part of the development of the electric bus project, local consultations to elicit unmet transport needs should be carried out – one covering an urban area and one covering a rural area.**

**That the Mid Suffolk Overview and Scrutiny Committees recommend to Cabinet that Suffolk County Council be informed of the apparent lack of publicity of community transport across the district, and to encourage joint working between Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils and Suffolk County Council to promote community transport services.**

## **4. REPORT AUTHOR**

Councillor Keith Welham – Chair of Mid Suffolk Overview and Scrutiny Committee