

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, 26 January 2023 at 5.30pm.

PRESENT:

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

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
Richard Meyer Suzie Morley
Dave Muller Mike Norris
Penny Otton Timothy Passmore
Dr Daniel Pratt Harry Richardson
Keith Scarff Andrew Stringer
Rowland Warboys Keith Welham
John Whitehead

In attendance:

Officers: Chief Executive (AC)
Deputy Chief Executive (KN)
Monitoring Officer (IA)
Director Corporate Resources (ME)
Corporate Manager Finance, Commissioning and Procurement (RH)
Shared Revenues Partnership Operational Manager (AM)
Corporate Manager Governance & Civic Office (JR)
Assistant Manager Governance (HH)

Apologies:

None received.

77 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS BY COUNCILLORS

77.1 The Chair invited the Monitoring Officer to explain matters surrounding the 'other registrable interests' ahead of item 11 for dual hatters in the relevant parish areas.

77.2 The Monitoring Officer stated that it was not necessary for dual hatters to disclose interests in regard to item 11, however Councillors may choose to do so should they wish for transparency purposes. Furthermore, declarations of 'other registrable interests' are only mandatory if they effect the financial or wellbeing of the respective organisation.

77.3 Councillor Matthissen queried whether this applied to district councillors who represented the wards in question or those who were members of one of the listed parish councils. Additionally, Councillor Matthissen asked whether the parish councils impacted by a boundary move, would be subject to this aforementioned advice, such as Combs Parish Council.

77.4 The Monitoring Officer confirmed that parish councils impacted by a boundary move would be included and that Combs Parish Council would be added to the list. Furthermore, the Monitoring Officer clarified that the advice only applied to those sitting on the parish councils in question (dual hatters), as district representatives who do not sit on the listed parish councils do not have an 'other registrable interest'.

77.5 Council Field questioned the applicability of Baylham council meeting, as it had intentions towards becoming a parish council.

77.6 The Monitoring Officer confirmed that it would only become applicable once it had obtained parish council status.

77.7 Councillor Amorowson asked whether adjoining parish boundaries are also applicable.

77.8 The Monitoring Officer replied yes eventually, but not at this juncture.

77.9 Councillor Muller and Councillor Brewster declared themselves as members of Stowmarket Town Council and as members of the Community Governance Review.

77.10 Councillor Humphreys, Councillor Amorowson and Councillor Ekpenyong declared themselves as members of Stowmarket Town Council.

77.11 Councillor Caston invited Councillors to declare any further realised interests at any point during the meeting.

77.12 The Monitoring Officer recommended that affected Councillors request a dispensation from the Monitoring Officer in writing to enable participation in future discussions.

77.13 Councillor Mansel asked whether dispensations are required to discuss the council tax reduction scheme.

77.14 The Monitoring Officer confirmed that Councillors had already been granted dispensation for the council tax reduction scheme from the last Annual Council.

78 MC/22/28 TO CONFIRM THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 24 NOVEMBER 2022

It was RESOLVED:-

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 24th November 2022 be confirmed and signed as a true record.

79 MC/22/29 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

79.1 The Chair referred Councillors to paper MC/22/29 for noting.

79.2 The Chair declared his attendance at his chosen charity, Stowmarket ASD Saturday Clubs on 21st January 2023 for their grand prize draw. In addition, he invited Councillors to his Civic Service at Bramford Church on 5th February 2023.

80 LEADER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

80.1 The Leader of the Council made the following announcements: -

Freeport East

Since our last meeting, I am pleased to say Freeport East has received final Government approval, allowing it to move forward into the delivery phase.

The development of the Freeport, which includes Gateway 14 at Stowmarket as one of the three main development sites, is expected to create up to 13,500 new jobs.

Getting to this major milestone is an important moment, and the result of much hard work from a number of different organisations, including Mid Suffolk District Council. The opportunities to welcome businesses to the region, as well as to create employment for people in and around Stowmarket and the Mid Suffolk area, will provide a huge boost to our local economy.

And I am pleased to report that this afternoon, I attended a ground breaking ceremony for The Range.

Solar car ports

Our new solar car ports have been unveiled at Mid Suffolk Leisure Centre in Stowmarket, and I was delighted to see this pioneering project complete. 70 solar carports are located at the centre, providing up to almost 24% of the centre's annual electricity demand.

We are among the UK's first rural local authorities to trial the technology, which will not only reduce the centre's reliance on the grid, but also cut carbon emissions. The site also includes battery storage so excess energy produced during sunnier periods can be saved for later, as well as electric vehicle charging points.

Combined with a similar scheme at Kingfisher Leisure Centre in Sudbury, the works cost £1.4m which was funded by £800,000 match funding from the DLUHC's Getting Building Fund - awarded by the New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership. This was topped up by a combined £650,000 from the councils. It is a good example of the innovative work we are doing to reduce carbon emissions.

Voter ID

As you will be aware, the Government has introduced a requirement for voters to show photo ID when voting at a polling station. The local and parish elections in May will be the first time that electors will need to show voter ID.

Mid Suffolk District Council is committed to ensuring residents are fully aware of what is happening and will be using our full range of communication channels to support the Electoral Commission's national campaign within our district. Members can also play a key role in raising awareness of these changes and there are resources available to help.

All members should have been sent details of these changes to help you respond to any questions. This includes a summary of the accepted forms of photo ID that can be used in polling stations. It also shows how residents without any of the accepted forms of photo ID can apply for a free voter ID document, known as a Voter Authority Certificate, online or complete a paper application form.

More details are available on our website or the Electoral Commission website.

New fleet of bin lorries

And finally... our new fleet of environmentally-friendly bin lorries has now hit the road, and I want to say thank you to the hundreds of our residents who suggested names for them.

The two-week long competition saw over 400 individual name suggestions from people of all ages, which was a great response. The councils' crews and waste team chose just 22 from the shortlist and came up with an excellent list.

So, we warmly welcome Ed Sheerbin and Gary Bineker, among others, to their new rounds.

80.1 Councillor Eburne requested clarification on whether the £650,000 top up for solar carports was from both Councils.

80.2 Councillor Morley believed it was from both Councils but would check.

80.3 Councillor Matthissen, in regard to voter ID, asked where paper applications would be able to be obtained for those without access to the internet.

80.4 The Chief Executive replied that it would be answered outside of the meeting.

80.5 Update: Those who require a paper application or are in need of assistance, can do so by contacting the Council for the form or help respectively. Contact can be either via one of the Council's Customer Access Points, the main telephone number: 0300 1234000 or emailing: elections@baberghmidsuffolk.gov.uk

Guidelines for the paper application process:-

When applying for a Voter Authority Certificate, you will need to provide your:

- name
- address
- date of birth
- National Insurance number

You should apply using the same name that you used to register to vote.

You will not need to provide your gender, and your certificate will not have a gender marker.

If you don't know your National Insurance number or don't have one, you can find your National Insurance number on:

- payslips
- official letters about tax, pensions or benefits

You can still apply if you don't know your National Insurance number, or don't have one, you will need to provide other forms of proof of identity, such as a birth certificate, bank statement and a utility bill. Your local council will contact you to arrange this.

If you don't have any other accepted proof of identity, you can ask someone you know to confirm your identity. This is known as an attestation.

Providing a photograph:

You will need to submit a photo with your application. The requirements for the photo are similar to the requirements for a passport photo.

If you need help taking a photo, then your local council will be able to do this for you. To be accepted, the photo you provide must meet certain requirements in terms of style, quality and size.

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

81.1 None received.

82 QUESTIONS BY THE PUBLIC IN ACCORDANCE WITH COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULES

82.1 None received.

83 QUESTIONS BY COUNCILLORS IN ACCORDANCE WITH COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULES

83.1 None received.

84 MC/22/30 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE REPORT

84.1 The Chair invited Councillor Welham, Chair of Overview & Scrutiny Committee to introduce report MC/22/30 which was for noting.

84.2 Councillor Passmore asked for further clarity on the Council facilitating a collaborative approach between organisations.

84.3 Councillor Welham responded that the approach is a recognised area of improvement to be worked on.

84.4 Councillor Scarff referred to pg. 20-21 where the Joint Overview & Scrutiny Committee supported a 30% uplift to local citizens advice and recommended a 2 year continuity and requested an update on the situation.

84.5 Councillor Welham confirmed the unanimous support of the O&S Committee and the inclusion of the item in the upcoming budget.

84.6 Councillor Pratt asked whether the report included considerations towards people experiencing rural poverty and lack of transport to reach urban centres.

84.7 Councillor Welham acknowledged there was sparse debate around the issue but mentioned that various Councillors did voice rural and urban differentiations and also that the Council is responsible for making sure rural residents are not disadvantaged.

84.8 Councillor Davies requested that the Council support SALC formally and financially as West and East Suffolk have done so already.

84.9 Councillor Welham commented that the request was outside the scope of the O&S Committee but agreed that the issue should be looked into by the communities portfolio.

84.10 Councillor Mansel referred to pg.21, section 3.2.2 and sought assurance that the protocol would improve the working relationship between Cabinet and O&S Committee.

84.11 Councillor Welham gave assurances that the O&S Committee welcomed the protocol and acknowledged the need for the protocol, providing examples.

85 RECOMMENDATIONS FROM CABINET / COMMITTEES

86 MCA/22/34 COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION (WORKING AGE) SCHEME 2023/24

86.1 The Chair invited Councillor Whitehead, Cabinet Member for Finance, Assets and Investments to introduce report MCA/22/34.

86.2 Councillor Whitehead **PROPOSED** the Recommendations which was **SECONDED** by Councillor Ekpenyong.

86.3 Councillor Eburne asked what the expected cost of the scheme was, and whether the government's council tax fund allocation was to be used in addition to the scheme.

86.4 Councillor Whitehead directed the Council to option 2 within the report in regard to the scheme's cost and further detailed the cost breakdown. Councillor Whitehead confirmed that the £114,000 government fund would be used in its entirety to be distributed to qualifying residents.

86.5 Councillor Eburne asked for confirmation that the total cost of the scheme was £16,600 and queried where the £26,100 in option C was placed.

86.6 Councillor Whitehead explained that as the scheme is dependent on qualifying residents, an anticipated cost of £26,100 had been reserved from the Council's Covid-19 earmarked reserve.

86.7 Councillor Eburne asked whether that meant the cost was in actually £42,700 from two financial resources.

86.8 Councillor Whitehead confirmed the total was £42,700 plus the addition of £6,600 subsidies for parish councils.

86.9 Councillor Eburne noted her dissatisfaction with the clarity of the figures.

86.10 Councillor Whitehead mentioned that simplified administration costs beyond year 1 would also save some expenses.

86.11 Councillor Mansel voiced concern to the survey results in Appendix D, which entailed a survey figure of 53 people, and asked how the survey was conducted. Additionally, Councillor Mansel expressed her disappointment on pg.34 that monetary figures were used instead of percentages.

86.12 The Director of Corporate Resources substantiated the survey process.

86.13 Councillor Whitehead clarified that 53 responded over and above the statutory requirement and defended the number as normal for a non-contentious item.

86.14 Councillor Pratt enquired what the eligibility for the council tax reduction scheme would be for people with a recognised disability who were not necessarily using universal credit.

86.15 The Shared Revenues Partnership Operational Manager explained that the scheme is a change to an existing scheme, with the simplification that those who work pay something and those who do not work pay nothing. Additionally, eligibility is low-income inclusive.

86.16 Councillor Passmore declared an interest as a police and crime commissioner with the agenda item impacting the policing budget. Councillor Passmore requested clarity on houses with multiple incomes.

86.17 The Shared Revenues Partnership Operational Manager explained that council tax is a household tax and therefore council tax reduction takes into consideration all household incomes. With regard to Universal Credit, the Department of Work and Pensions take over the means test and eligibility.

86.18 Councillor Stringer asked what determines a deserving recipient.

86.19 The Shared Revenues Partnership Operational Manger answered that the award was for anybody in receipt of council tax reduction, with the exception of those who obtain 100% council tax reduction as the £25 award is only deductible on remaining balances.

86.20 Councillor Carter sought clarification on whether the 100% reduction applies to those with UC and/or to those on the council tax reduction scheme.

86.21 Councillor Whitehead confirmed both.

86.22 Councillor Matthissen requested a communications release to clarify the process.

86.23 Councillors debated the matter in support of the recommendation to assist the financially vulnerable. During the debate some concern was raised regarding residents who might not quite qualify though the cost-of-living strategy was acknowledged as another avenue of support. Concern was also voiced towards the arrangements for the subsequent financial year, as well as concern towards the clarity of the financial reporting due to the entanglement with other districts and the Ipswich Borough in the Shared Revenues Partnership. In addition, it was acknowledged that the scheme would provide a reduction in administrative expenses and staff pressures.

It was RESOLVED:

1. That Council approved Option 3 (as set out in Appendix C of this report) be used as the basis for a revised (Working Age) Council Tax Reduction Scheme for 2023/24. In addition, the following recommendations as a result of the Governments announcements in the Provisional Settlement relating to the additional local Council Tax Support award for 2023/24
2. That Council approved the introduction of an additional Local Council Tax Support award for 2023/24 of up to at least £25 per recipient where residual liability for Council Tax exists, as permitted under Section 13A (1) (c) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992.
2. That Council gives authority to the Director for Corporate Resources in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Finance to agree Local Discretionary Policy as permitted under Section 13A (1) (c) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 to determine the method of distribution for any funds remaining from the additional Council Tax Support Fund for 2023/24.

87 JAC/21/38 HALF YEAR REPORT ON TREASURY MANAGEMENT 2022/23

87.1 The Chair invited Councillor Muller, the Co-Chair of Joint Audit and Standards Committee to introduce report JAC/21/38.

87.2 Councillor Muller and the Corporate Manger for Finance, Commissioning and Procurement corrected errors within the report:

- On pg.43 point 9 of 4.7, it should state that Mid Suffolk's overall debt decreased by £7million in line with table 3 appendix B.
- On pg.53 in table 2 in appendix A, it should state medium/long-term borrowing of £104,835million and short-term borrowing of £30.5million at 31/3/22 and medium/long-term borrowing of £99.285million and short-term borrowing of £29million at 30/9/22. Table 3 on pg.55 show the corrected borrowing figures.

87.3 Councillor Muller **PROPOSED** the Recommendations which was **SECONDED** by Councillor Caston.

87.4 Councillor Warboys enquired in regard to pg.42 as to why barriers to trade, in particular with the Eurozone, were not included in the context of how the report was made.

87.5 The Director of Corporate Resources advised that the economic context is provided by treasury advisors and that she would ask them about the inclusion of barriers to trade for reports going forward.

87.6 Councillor Otton queried pg.62 paragraph 1.14-17 in regard to the department of levelling up, stating the decision as yet to be announced with unusable reserves and requested further clarity on possible changes in how councils are able to manage.

87.7 The Corporate Manager for Finance, Commissioning & Procurement replied that since the report was prepared, an announcement had been received on the issue and this entails an accounting adjustment which negates the impact of rises and falls of the values of these investments on Council's revenue budget and has been extended up to the financial year of 24/25.

87.8 Councillor Eburne asked in regard to the review of all council activities and ESG considerations pg.44 paragraphs 11.1 and 11.3, what work was being carried out by cabinet to progress these points. Additionally, Councillor Eburne enquired about the lack of initial investment figures listed on pg.68 for all investment tables.

87.9 The Director for Corporate Resources confirmed issues will be taken forward with the treasury advisors.

87.10 Councillor Amorowson asked whether there was an error on pg.64 with tables 6.2 and 6.3 due to their similarity.

87.11 The Corporate Manager for Finance, Commissioning & Procurement responded that the tables will be checked for accuracy. Councillor Matthissen asked a question related to pg.60 whether the CIPFA code and government guidance on treasury has yet to recommend ESG criteria, as well as security, liquidity and prudence.

87.12 The Director for Corporate Resources was not aware of any current conversations with CIPFA but recognised that more work is required on the matter.

87.13 Councillor Mansel questioned the inclusion of the climate change task group on pg.44 section 11.

87.14 The Director for Corporate Resources confirmed that while the task group is no longer active, activities will still be reviewed through the guise of the work on climate change.

87.15 Councillors debated the report. Comments were made on mitigating risk. Discontent was voiced with the errors within and delay to the report, and concern towards the lack of diversity of investments. Conversely, it was acknowledged that the report is a snapshot in time, and that a periodic review may be more preferable. In addition, it was advised that officers and the audit committee perform more rigorously going forward.

87.16 The Chair explained the report required formal noting.

It was RESOLVED:

- 1) That the Treasury Management activity for the first six months of 2022/23 as set out in report JAC/21/38 and Appendices be noted.
- 2) That it be noted that Mid Suffolk District Council's treasury management activity for the first six months of 2022/23 was in accordance with the approved Treasury Management Strategy, and that, except for one occasion when the Council exceeded its daily bank account limit with Lloyds, as mentioned in Appendix C, paragraph 4.1, the Council has complied with all the Treasury Management Indicators for this period.

88 MC/22/31 COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEWS 2022

88.1 The Chair invited the Monitoring Officer to introduce report MC/22/31.

88.2 The Recommendation was **PROPOSED** by Councillor Richardson and **SECONDED** by Whitehead.

88.3 Councillor Otton queried why the community governance working group has been presented with a boundary review that the group was not tasked to oversee.

88.4 The Chair stated the importance of the current Monitoring Officer not being in post at the time when the review commenced and that historic actions will not be able to be commented on.

88.5 The Monitoring Officer explained that the implication of the parish submissions entailed a boundary review.

88.6 Councillor Pratt asked why adequate consultation had not been carried out within the time frame and how much more time would be needed.

88.7 The Monitoring Officer said he was unable to comment on why adequate consultations were not conducted within the timeline but that a new timeline could be established once liaison with the boundary commission had taken place, to ensure their requirements are met.

88.8 The Monitoring Officer clarified that the initial review only reached parish and town councils without having taken the next level of consultation involving residents, housing associations, and other stakeholders. The depth of consultation is a discretionary matter for the Council; however, the Monitoring Officer cautioned that the current level of consultation would not be adequate for the boundary commission to accept.

88.9 Councillor Scarff voiced concern at whether the working group was provided the right brief and asked what lessons could be learnt from the situation.

88.10 The Monitoring Officer apologised that he was unable to comment.

88.11 Councillor Scarff requested that questions raised by the Council on the matter be looked into and answered at a later date.

88.12 Councillor Mansel queried whether any other process was required for the movement of ward boundaries.

88.13 The Monitoring Officer advised that clarification from the boundary commission would take precedence, and anticipated ward boundaries would entail greater consultation.

88.14 Councillor Eburne noted that it would have been useful for the original report Officer to have been in attendance and additionally noted that the Leader of the Council was also behind the original report and suggested questions be directed towards them.

88.15 Councillor Ekpenyong recommended seeking answers from the previous Monitoring Officer, other officers and the Chief Executive.

88.16 The Chief Executive acknowledged the complexity of the matter and believed the focus should be placed towards moving forward with lessons learnt. The Chief Executive stated that future governance reviews would be managed differently.

88.17 Councillor Matthissen requested that the scope of the governance review group be clarified in regard to ward boundaries changes, in reference to 4.2.

88.18 Councillor Otton **PROPOSED** an amendment to support the recommendation of appendix A and defer recommendation 3.2 **SECONDED** by Councillor Mansel.

88.19 The Chief Executive sought clarity on whether the amendment was to defer the consideration within Council or to defer the governance review in its entirety.

88.20 Councillor Otton clarified that the amendment would be to remove recommendation 3.2 from Council.

88.21 The Monitoring Officer explained that should 3.2 be deferred, the process would continue in motion as the process has not reached a conclusion.

88.22 Councillor Mansel read out recommendation 3.2 and reiterated that the recommendation is for Council to note. As such, Councillor Mansel stated that there was a need for more explanation before Council could note the matter.

88.23 Councillor Passmore pressed for moving the review forward and reasoned that outstanding queries could be addressed in addition.

88.24 Councillor Richardson contested the amendment and agreed with Councillor Passmore.

88.25 Councillor Otton withdrew her amendment.

88.26 Councillor Mansel disputed the necessity for Council to accept 3.2, as the process would continue and requested the separation of the recommendations.

88.27 The Chair asked the Council whether they were content to vote on each recommendation individually.

88.28 Councillor Scarff asked for legal position of the Council for non-determination of the matter within the 12-month period.

88.29 The Monitoring Officer informed the Council that they would be subject to judicial review in any situation but advised that continuing the process would provide the Council grounds to defend against any potential legal challenges.

88.30 Councillor Warboys raised confusion about the status of the review as 'ongoing'.

88.31 The Monitoring Officer clarified that the process is ongoing as the wider consultation has not taken place as well as accounting for the next 5 years of developments.

88.32 Councillor Scarff contended that a review could have been held earlier and commented that Stowmarket Town Council is not financed for providing services to the residents in the new developments in the disputed boundary area.

88.33 Councillor Mansel disputed the relevancy of Councillor Scarff's comments.

88.34 Councillor Welham invited the proposer and seconder to withdraw recommendation 3.2. Councillor Richardson withdrew recommendation 3.2.

It was RESOLVED:

That Council agreed the recommendations in Appendix A

89 MC/22/32 SPECIAL URGENT DECISIONS TAKEN BY OFFICERS UNDER DELEGATED POWERS IN ACCORDANCE WITH PART 2 OF THE CONSTITUTION

89.1 The Chair invited the Chief Executive to introduce report MC/22/32 which was for noting.

89.2 Councillor Fleming asked how many new devices were provided and for the division of goods versus services for the cost and noted that a breakdown would have been appreciated.

89.3 The Chief Executive provided a breakdown of 3,078 carbon monoxide detectors and 2,937 smoke detectors into tenant properties.

89.4 Councillor Eburne requested whether this decision was taken to comply with the new regulations from the social housing regulator and whether additional compliance issues will arise from this that will entail Council spending and other contracts.

89.5 The Chief Executive confirmed the decision links the 2022 regulations and anticipated further future compliances.

89.6 Councillor Whitehead asked whether the figures provided encompassed both Councils.

89.7 The Chief Executive clarified that the figures provided were only related to Mid Suffolk and that the inclusion of Babergh would essentially double those figures.

90 COUNCILLOR APPOINTMENTS

90.1 There were no changes to placings.

91 MOTIONS ON NOTICE

91.1 None received.

The business of the meeting was concluded at 8.15pm

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Chair