

## MSDC COUNCIL – 19 JULY 2023

### ITEM 5 – LEADER’S ANNOUNCEMENTS

#### Leader’s announcements, MSDC Council @ The Blackbourne, Elmswell, 19th July 2023

We are now over two months into this new council term – and I hope that all new members are now settling into their role as councillors. The initial induction and training is largely done, and committees and working groups have started to meet and conduct the council’s work. For the new administration it has been a busy start:

Work is continuing to establish our key strategic priorities. The council’s Corporate Plan refresh starts soon; our Residents’ Survey – so important to help us understand the views and needs of our communities – launches this week; and our State of the District report will also soon be published. These will all influence and shape what we do to improve our district over the next four years.

However, as a new administration, we have already tasked officers with a series of initial actions that we want to see happen quickly. I am happy to introduce these to council today and outline the progress that has already been made.

Firstly, we want to make an immediate improvement to the local environment by cleaning up litter and improving the appearance of the district. This will involve our own staff in extra clearance work, and we also want to encourage parish and town councils and residents to get involved too. We are creating a fund for additional cleaning work across the district, to help encourage community action and enhance pride in where we live. We want this to reach every town and every village, as well as main roads like the A14 and A140. The campaign will be called **Pride in Your Place**, and will be launched next month, members will receive further details in due course.

Secondly, we want our council to feel closer to its communities. We already taken some council meetings, such as this one, out of Ipswich and back in the district that we represent - I am delighted that we can be here in Elmswell this evening. The cabinet meeting last week was at the John Peel Centre in Stowmarket. Other meetings will take place in the district where this is appropriate. We also want to improve residents’ access to the council: a new improved website is coming, and whilst there has already been a reduction in call waiting times when our residents call us, we want to improve this further.

We see an immediate need to ramp up work on making more homes energy efficient. Keeping people warm for less is vital during the cost-of-living crisis and also helps reduce our carbon footprint. We already have £2 million set aside for this purpose, agreed at the budget meeting earlier this year. We are designing a scheme to fund or subsidise home insulation measures for those in greatest need, discussions have already started with others working in this space and we aim to launch this in time to make an impact this winter.

Next, we want to address the problem of rural isolation and lack of public transport options. Our district’s bus services are insufficient or non-existent in many rural communities, and we want to find ways of addressing this - working with partners, we are looking at opportunities for electric buses or other forms of community transport. We are opening discussions with a range of operators.

We want our communities to have more of a say about what we do. For example, we want to give them a voice when deciding how we spend their money. So, the process of setting next year's budget will involve participation by residents in shaping spending and saving priorities.

We are establishing a clear position on the development of solar farms in our district. The cabinet member for heritage, planning and infrastructure has been drafting this with our planning team, but we urgently need Government clarity on this matter - as you may have seen from my comments at the LGA conference and in a media release last week.

We will be convening a water summit with other stakeholders, looking at the challenges faced - particularly in areas where there is a commercial water shortage - and how we can address them together.

It will surprise no-one that a golden thread running through our administration will be taking serious and appropriate action on carbon reduction and biodiversity. We are reviewing and evaluating the council's existing plans, establishing what further work is necessary.

We are ambitious for our town centres, which have been under pressure from the change in shopping habits and the impact of covid lockdowns. We want to quickly introduce initiatives that can begin to make a positive impact, building on work already under way. Officers are working on a list of costed interventions from the wayfinding strategy, while the 'vision' programme will also be reviewed and refreshed.

How we publicly report our performance is also being refined, with specific measurable objectives that are clear to our staff and residents.

As I've already said, protecting and enhancing our environment is vitally important. Therefore, we will be looking at how we can improve the council's response to reports of environmental damage, and respond quickly when trees, hedges and green spaces are under threat.

We want to engage much more with young people, so they feel they have a voice in local democracy. To address this, we're looking at various ideas which provide an opportunity to educate, inform and invite participation.

Finally, we want to work on all these initiatives in the context of an open and productive working relationship with council officers, where we are free to encourage and challenge one other in positive ways. These thirteen areas are where we aim to deliver an immediate impact, and I will keep council updated at future meetings on these and on our longer-term plans.

In closing, I'd also like to take this opportunity to welcome the news that the Tour of Britain men's cycle race will be coming to Mid Suffolk on Thursday 7 September, passing through a number of towns and villages including Debenham, Stowmarket and Needham Market. Whilst there will be some temporary road closures and travel disruption as the peloton passes through, it's a great opportunity to showcase our fantastic district and for communities to come together and encourage the riders.