

MID SUFFOLK DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of the **MSDC COUNCIL** held in the Blackbourne Community Centre, Elmswell IP30 9UH on Wednesday, 19 July 2023

PRESENT:

Councillor: Rowland Warboys (Chairman)
Dr Daniel Pratt (Vice-Chair)

Councillors:	David Bradbury	James Caston
	Austin Davies	Teresa Davis
	Rachel Eburne	Lucy Elkin
	Lavinia Hadingham	Nicholas Hardingham
	Terry Lawrence	Colin Lay
	Anders Linder	Sarah Mansel
	Adrienne Marriott	John Matthissen
	Andrew Mellen	Gilly Morgan
	David Napier	Jen Overett
	James Patchett	David Penny
	Dr Ross Piper	Miles Row
	Andrew Stringer	John Whitehead
	Nicky Willshere	Richard Winch

In attendance:

Guest(s): Keith Welham

Officers: Chief Executive (AC)
Deputy Monitoring Officer and Corporate Manager Governance & Civic Office (JR)
Director - Economic Growth and Climate Change (FD)

Apologies:

Terence Carter
Matthew Hicks
Janet Pearson
Keith Scarff
Ollie Walters
Tim Weller

18 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS BY COUNCILLORS

18.1 Councillor Caston declared a disclosable pecuniary interest in respect of Item 13a, Motion on Notice and declared that he would leave the room for this item.

19 MC/23/6 TO CONFIRM THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 22 MAY 2023

It was RESOLVED:-

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 22 May 2023 be confirmed and signed as a true record.

20 MC/23/7 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

20.1 The Chair referred Councillors to paper MC/23/7 for noting.

21 LEADER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

21.1 Councillor Mellen, Leader of the Council made the following announcements:-

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 being 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.

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

22.1 None received.

23 QUESTIONS BY THE PUBLIC IN ACCORDANCE WITH COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULES

23.1 None received.

24 QUESTIONS BY COUNCILLORS IN ACCORDANCE WITH COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULES

Question 1

Councillor Whitehead to Councillor Mellen, Leader of the Council

At Full Council in September 2021, Councillor Mellen asked the then Leader of the Council a question as follows: - "We are going to have to start asking our residents to start making difficult choices in the years ahead about how they live, how they travel, what they eat, and how they heat their homes. Is this administration ready to provide the leadership on this issue that Mid Suffolk needs?" Nearly two years on, and with Councillor Mellen now the Leader of this council, can I ask him, for the benefit of both myself and the residents in my ward, to set out in detail against each of the four matters he raised – "live", "travel", "eat" and "heat" – what are difficult choices he will be requiring of Mid Suffolk residents in the years ahead?

Response from Councillor Mellen

I am grateful to Councillor Whitehead for his question and I will attempt to answer it with the detail he has requested – though I think to unpack these issues comprehensively would require a lot more time than the chairman would allow.

Let me start by saying that I don't in any way resile from the point I was trying to make back in September 2021. I do believe that we will all face difficult choices in the years ahead, but these choices are not forced on residents by me, or by this administration, they come about because of the scale of the challenge that climate change is bringing, and the very urgent need for resilience building and adaptation.

Now I'm not sure exactly what Councillor Whitehead's believes about climate change, I think he did vote in favour of declaring a climate emergency back in July 2019 though it was not a recorded vote so I can't be sure. But let's just say for the benefit of anyone who is doubtful that there are some very loud warning bells ringing just now: Let me just quote a couple of key voices: The director general of the United Nations, Antonio Guterres, speaking at the COP27 summit in Egypt last autumn, said that, "*We are on a highway to climate hell with our foot still on the accelerator.*" The International Panel on Climate Change in its most recent report published earlier this year said that, "*There is a rapidly closing window of opportunity to secure a liveable and sustainable future for all*".

Anyone watching the TV news this week will have seen the reality of a changing climate in various locations around the world as temperature records have once again been broken. Arizona is now on its 19th straight day of temperatures over 43 degrees Celsius. There are record-breaking wildfires in Canada, Greece, the Canary Islands and California. In Italy the government has advised tourists in the capital to stay out of the scorching daytime sun. The warning from the World Meteorological Organisation is that these extremes are a taste of things to come – unless urgent and drastic action is taken to reduce our carbon emissions. I hope and believe that there is still time to make a difference, if the world acts together, and much of that action needs to happen at the local level – and that is where we as a local authority can play our part. The danger is that so far, the global response has been too slow, and too little. Too many people still think that we can get through this if we make some minor changes to the way we live, maybe by upping our recycling and turning down the central heating by a degree or two. If we continue with that mindset, given the scale of the challenge we would be tinkering around the edges of the problem, playing around while millions suffer, literally fiddling while Rome burns. Why do I describe those choices as difficult? Change is never easy, and the changes I think we will see in the years ahead will be challenging. We and our residents are used to living in a certain way, and asking people to move away from that for the greater good is no easy task. But our residents are already needing to adjust to the impacts of climate change, extreme heat last summer, increased rainfall and flooding. Councillor Whitehead has asked for detail in four areas, I am happy to point him in the direction of useful information about the sort of action that is required in each one:

1. How we travel: The UK's Climate Change Committee, (until recently chaired by a Mid-Suffolk resident, Lord Deben) published a report at the end of June, less than a month ago, about the requirement for a modal shift away from car use, and the considerable barriers that have to be overcome to make this happen. No easy choices here, but the report does say that local government has a big part to play in specific interventions.

2. What we eat: there are many reports on this, but I'll just pick out one: The World Wide Fund for Nature published a report called *Eating for Net Zero* which details the sort of changes we need to make to the UK diet if we are to reduce the carbon emissions from food production and consumption. Again, not an easy task to get people to change buying and eating habits, but there are massive health benefits to be gained as well as the climate benefits if we change our diet.
3. How we heat our homes: The Energy Savings Trust is a good place to start with this subject. Their website states that in order to meet the government's legally-binding target for emissions reductions, we will need to reduce the carbon emissions from heating our homes by 95% over the next 30 years. This is a massive challenge and with the lurching changes in energy prices over the last year or so, making the right choice about insulating and heating our homes is complicated, lacking clear advice and difficult. (I will just add here that one of the administration's long-term aims is to improve the advice that is available to residents locally, so that they can find their way through the maze of information and make the right choices)
4. How we live: This of course is a summary of the other areas and more. I will return again to the words of Lord Deben in his final letter to the Prime Minister as chair of the Climate Change Committee: *"Our children will not forgive us if we leave them a world of withering heat and devastating storms, where sea level rises and extreme temperatures force millions to move because their countries are no longer habitable. None of us can avoid our responsibility. Delay is not an option."*

There is an enormous amount we can do as a local authority to prepare our communities for the challenges of the future. These are also opportunities to help our communities wellbeing as I have identified. So much of the response to climate change will need to be local, and that's partly due to the lack of leadership and collective action at the national level. My sense is that we need to be honest with our residents about the size of the task, and in facing that challenge together, supporting people in making those difficult choices (as we are through the actions I outlined earlier), we may just unleash the creativity and imagination that will be needed in the years ahead.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION

Councillor Whitehead to Councillor Mellen, Leader of the Council

It is difficult without seeing the answer in black and white to frame up an immediate answer, so I look forward to seeing the written response in due course. But could I just ask Councillor Mellen as the leader of the first Green majority Council in the northern hemisphere does he see that it is the role of the Council and it's residents to be taking a lead and demonstrating being the forefront all these difficult choices, or does he perhaps otherwise see others taking lead on this?

Response from Councillor Mellen

Although we are the first majority Green administration, there are other Greens in leadership across the country. I think there are 9 or 10 Green leaders, and Greens are involved in the leadership in coalitions of over 30 Councils. So, we are not alone in wanting to take a lead on these kinds of issues, I do not expect us to be an outlier because I think councillors and administrations of all colours, I hope, are dealing with these kinds of challenges and attempting to address them in terms of making sure their residents are ready for the changes that are coming towards us.

25 MC/23/8 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT 2022/23 AND WORK PLAN 2023/24

25.1 The Chair invited Councillor Caston, Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to introduce the report.

25.2 Councillor Caston introduced the report and invited Mr Keith Welham, former Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to provide an overview of the Annual Report.

25.3 Councillor Eburne questioned whether the General Fund and Housing Revenue Account reviews would continue the approach of looking at the assumptions ahead of looking at the budgets as this had worked well the previous year. Councillor Caston responded that it was intended to follow the same format as the previous year.

25.4 Councillor Eburne further questioned whether the annual review of Citizens Advice and Cost of Living Crisis That the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee supports the 30% uplift to Local Citizens Advice and the work being conducted as a result and recommends that this support continues for a further 2 years, and what the progress was on the steering group. Councillor Caston responded that he would speak to officers to get an update on the steering group.

25.5 Councillor Matthissen asked if Councillor Caston could publicise more widely the Councillor call to action as many issues arise with multiple different agencies, some of which are outside of the Council. Councillor Caston responded that work was ongoing to help promote the role of scrutiny and what can be scrutinised on social media and working out how greater public participation can be achieved.

25.6 The Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2022/2023 and Work Plan 2023/24 was noted.

26 MC/23/9 GREENHOUSE GAS REPORT 2021-22

26.1 The Chair invited Councillor Winch to introduce the report.

26.2 Councillor Winch gave an overview of the report and proposed the recommendations. Councillor Austin Davies seconded this motion.

- 26.3 Councillor Caston questioned the use of oil burners and what the conversion rate between litre of oil used and Carbon emissions produced. The Director Economic Growth and Climate Change stated that a response would be provided outside of the meeting.
- 26.4 Councillor Mansel queried the transition to Carbon Neutral graph and whether the graph should not be a straight line and would be more of a staggered decline. The Director – Economic Growth and Climate Change responded that whilst there was a Carbon Reduction Management Plan, the actions within the plan had not been prioritised and that the Task and Finish Group would look at these actions to achieve the targets.
- 26.5 Councillor Whitehead referred to page 56 of the report and questioned the intensity measurements and whether the measurement of CO₂e per resident is accurate as 56.6% of emissions came from leisure centres or sheltered housing which was not used by the majority of residents. The Director – Economic Growth and Climate Change responded that this would be revisited ahead of the final report.
- 26.6 Councillor Whitehead further questioned the EPC rating of E for Endeavour House and whether this effects the renewal of the lease as after April 2027 rentals cannot be under an EPC rating of C. Councillor Winch responded that when the 2030 deadline was reached this would have to come under review, and that pressure would need to be put on the landlord in order to reduce this rating.
- 26.7 Councillor Eburne questioned whether the proposed Task and Finish Group could look at things outside of the reporting framework and if they could not how things outside of the report could be addressed. The Director – Economic Growth and Climate Change responded that there was flexibility within the guidelines to bring more into the scope and within the Carbon Reduction Management Plan there was work ongoing to capture a wider community and business focus.
- 26.8 Councillor Caston stated that the 2.2 tonnes per carbon per resident was not a good measure as the Carbon was generated by the Council and not it's residents. He also stated that the Council needed to be aware of the use of external contractors and their inability to provide the emissions they used. Additionally, he stated that the use of offsetting needed to be reduced and the focus should be on the reduction of the use of Carbon.
- 26.9 Councillor Eburne stated that the report was out of date, and it would be interesting to see what the current report was and how current work would impact it. Whilst the focus of the report was narrow, all Councillors had the ability to show leadership and influence across the district to encourage carbon reduction.
- 26.10 Councillor Austin Davis agreed that the use of offsetting should be reduced. He added that the scope of the remit should be broadened to cover activities of the Council such as CIFCO and Gateway 14 and leadership could be

shown through these assets.

26.11 Councillor Matthissen stated that whilst there were projects in place such as the retrofitting of Council properties, work in getting EV charging put in place publicly, and discouraging the use of cars and making cycling and walking more accessible, there was more to be done to influence residents of the district.

26.12 Councillor Lawrence added that it was not just residents that needed to be influenced but also developers, and that carbon footprint per head could be included within their development plans.

26.13 Councillor Winch added that the Task and Finish Group should keep it's scope wide and that how the issue is communicated to residents needs to be considered.

By a unanimous vote.

It was RESOLVED:-

1.1 That the contents of the Greenhouse Gas Emissions report 2021-22 at Appendix A to the report be noted.

1.2 That a Task and Finish group is established to review and refresh actions in the Carbon Reduction Management Plan.

27 MC/23/10 REVIEW OF THE DELIVERY OF THE 2023 DISTRICT, TOWN & PARISH ELECTIONS

27.1 The Chair invited the Chief Executive to introduce report MC/23/10.

27.2 Councillor Mellen proposed the recommendations as set out in the report, Councillor Caston seconded the motion.

27.3 Councillor Mellen thanked the Chief Executive for his quick and detailed look at the issues when they arose.

27.4 Councillor Caston praised the work of officers at the polling station and count as the process was done well and efficiently.

27.5 Councillor Patchett questioned whether the bills to parishes had been sent out and whether a reduction was given to those who had a disrupted electoral system, and how it would be dealt with if a bigger reduction was requested. The Chief Executive responded that it is relayed to parishes ahead of the election what the cost is going to be, and there were savings due to the district and parish elections being run simultaneously. The majority of parishes were unaffected and there was the option for parishes that were impact to make representation of their concerns.

27.6 Councillor Bradbury queried how many residents did not make it into the polling stations due to voter ID and how many left when they discovered they did not have ID. The Chief Executive responded that these figures would be provided outside of the meeting, and that a comparison could be done of

turnout between the previous election in 2019.

- 27.7 Councillor Eburne asked for clarification on if there was a project plan in place, and when the practice election would take place. The Chief Executive responded that there had been more project support in place at a corporate level than there had been at previous elections, and that a standard template for election planning was used. Additionally, the test election would be a test of the digital software.
- 27.8 Councillor Eburne further questioned when the preparations for the Police Crime Commissioner and Suffolk County Council elections would begin. The Chief Executive responded that the action plan would cover three key areas: the shared learning from this election especially in areas such as the nominations process, the changes in legislation that came in alongside voter ID, and preparing for the next round of elections and that process started now but it would not formally until Police Area Returning Officer was appointed.
- 27.9 Councillor Penny questioned why the nomination process was not run online as people had to travel to hand in their papers, and digital forms may reduce the risk of error. The Chief Executive responded that whilst the system was outdated, it is a legal requirement to do the process on paper and nomination papers had to be handed in in person. Nominations could be received at points within the District to minimise travel for parishes.
- 27.10 Councillor Mansel queried whether the deadline for postal votes was within the Council's power or whether that was down to the electoral commission. The Chief Executive responded that the deadline for postal vote processing was part of the legislation, however the Council did have the decision of when polling cards were sent out.
- 27.11 Councillor Row asked for figures regarding the number of people who were on the electoral register and applied for postal votes but were denied due to additional information being required after the deadline. The Chief Executive responded that this information would be provided outside of the meeting.
- 27.12 Councillor Bradbury queried whether new developments and tenants moving in packs could contain information about registering to vote. The Chief Executive responded that this would be looked at and considered.
- 27.13 Councillor Mansel welcomed the internal and external review of the election process and thought it was a good idea for the action plan to go to the Joint Audit and Standards Committee.

By a unanimous vote.

It was RESOLVED:-

To note the content of Appendices A and B, and request that the Joint Audit and Standards Committee review the draft action plan arising from those reviews.

28 COUNCILLOR APPOINTMENTS

28.1 The appointments as set out in the agenda were proposed by Councillor Mellen. Councillor Mansel seconded the recommendation.

By 27 votes for and 1 against.

It was RESOLVED: -

That the following appointments be made:

DIRECTOR - FREEPORT EAST LTD

Rachel Eburne

EAST SUFFOLK WATER MANAGEMENT BOARD

David Bradbury

IPSWICH STRATEGIC AREA PLANNING BOARD

John Matthissen (Sub)

SUFFOLK FLOOD RISK MANAGEMENT SCRUTINY SUB COMMITTEE

Dave Penny (Sub)

SUFFOLK POLICE AND CRIME PANEL

James Patchett (Sub)

SUFFOLK WASTE PARTNERSHIP

Tim Weller (replacing Teresa Davis)

WESTERN SUFFOLK COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP (WSCSP)

Lucy Elkin (Sub)

JOINT GYPSY & TRAVELLER STEERING GROUP

Anders Linder

Nicky Willshere

SUFFOLK JOINT STANDARDS BOARD

Adrienne Marriott

29 MOTIONS ON NOTICE

30 TO CONSIDER THE MOTION ON NOTICE RECEIVED FROM COUNCILLOR MELLEN

30.1 Councillor Caston left the meeting at 7:18pm.

30.2 Councillor Mellen **PROPOSED** the motion which asked the Chairman of the Council to write to the relevant government minister in order to formally object to the Norwich to Tilbury overhead line project.

30.3 Councillor Stringer **SECONDED** the motion.

30.4 Members debated the motion, discussing issues including: that the government needed to address the issue with electricity distribution more widely and not just the Norwich to Tilbury project, that the council should bring the districts landscapes and their history into the consultation with national grid to show their value and so they do not get destroyed, if there was anything that could be done to encourage neighbouring districts to write similar letters to the relevant government minister, that negotiations could take place to run powerlines underground, that a solution is required to not just push back the proposal but implement change in how the network is coordinated with the offshore grid.

30.5 The Chair added that he was happy to write the letter and Members were welcome to send it to their parish councils, it would also be sent to the relevant minister, any local members of the house of lords and the leader of the Essex Suffolk Norfolk Pylons Group.

By a unanimous vote.

It was RESOLVED: -

For the avoidance of doubt, Mid Suffolk District Council considers its role of protecting and promoting the interests of the district's communities, businesses and environment to be of utmost importance and we recognise the contribution Mid Suffolk makes to the unique character and quality of Suffolk and the wider eastern region.

The Council acknowledges the national importance of strategic energy infrastructure for the transition to net zero. We have previously stated a preference for a coordinated, offshore approach to the delivery of transmission reinforcement, import and export objectives including consolidation of offshore connections and onshore infrastructure together with appropriate management of construction activities to effectively minimise and mitigate harm to Suffolk's communities and environment.

While the Council will be making a formal response to the non-statutory consultation on the Norwich to Tilbury overhead line project (formerly East Anglia Green) in due course, through this motion we re-state publicly, on behalf of our communities, our objection to the proposed pylon line, and our strong preference for an integrated offshore approach.

We therefore agree that the Chair of the Council will write to the relevant government minister to communicate these objections.

The business of the meeting was concluded at 7.45 pm.

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Chair