

MID SUFFOLK DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of the **MSDC COUNCIL** held in the King Edmund Chamber, Endeavour House, 8 Russell Road, Ipswich on Thursday, 21 September 2023

PRESENT:

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

Councillors: David Bradbury
James Caston
Rachel Eburne
Lavinia Hadingham
Matthew Hicks
Anders Linder
Adrienne Marriott
Andrew Mellen
Jen Overett
David Penny
Miles Row
Andrew Stringer
Tim Weller
Richard Winch

Terence Carter
Teresa Davis
Lucy Elkin
Nicholas Hardingham
Colin Lay
Sarah Mansel
John Matthissen
Gilly Morgan
James Patchett
Dr Ross Piper
Keith Scarff
Ollie Walters
John Whitehead

In attendance:

Guest(s): Sir Christopher Haworth – Chair CIFCO Capital Ltd
Henry Cooke – Director CIFCO Capital Ltd
Mark Sargeantson – Director CIFCO Capital Ltd
Nigel Golder – Director Strategic Asset Management JLL

Officers: Chief Executive (AC)
Deputy Chief Executive (KN)
Deputy Monitoring Officer and Corporate Manager Governance & Civic Office (JR)
Director – Assets and Investment (EA)
Director – Corporate Resources (ME)
Director – Customers, Digital Transformation & Improvement (SW)
Corporate Manager – Council's Companies
Corporate Manager – Finance, Commissioning & Procurement (BP)
Corporate Manager – Strategic Policy (JH)
Research and Insight Lead (CH)

Apologies: Austin Davies
Terry Lawrence
David Napier
Janet Pearson
Nicky Willshire

31 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS BY COUNCILLORS

31.1 The Monitoring Officer had granted dispensation to councillors on the Board of Directors for the council's companies.

31.2 There were no other declarations of interests from councillors.

32 MC/23/11 TO CONFIRM THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 19 JULY 2023

It was RESOLVED:-

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 19 July 2023 be confirmed and signed as a true record.

33 MC/23/12 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

33.1 The Chair referred Councillors to paper MC/23/12 for noting.

34 LEADER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

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

I hope all councillors managed to enjoy a break over the summer.

I would like to mark the passing of former district Councillor Poppy Robinson, who was a member of this council from 2003 to 2015. She represented the Stowmarket Central ward and was a member of planning committee. Poppy passed away since our last council meeting, and I am sure all members will join me in sending our condolences to her family and friends.

Work has been continuing on our administration's initial plans, and we were delighted last month to launch a new initiative, Pride in Your Place. This has given every town and village in the district the opportunity to apply for funding for projects which improve the appearance and cleanliness of their community. This can be for initiatives like litter picking, sign cleaning, graffiti removal, and the maintenance/enhancement of open public spaces and more. I would like to remind all councillors that this fund remains open and can I ask you to encourage your towns and parishes to get involved.

In the last month, we have announced two initiatives to support small and new businesses, which are the lifeblood of our communities.

Mid Suffolk Council has teamed up with MENTA to offer start-up businesses free expert support and guidance. The council was given funding from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund to deliver this scheme, and the programme is open to those in Mid Suffolk who are thinking of starting a business, are in the process of starting a business or have recently started their business venture.

Meanwhile, businesses in Mid Suffolk can also potentially benefit from a new round of funding thanks to the Rural England Prosperity Fund.

Small businesses and community organisations across the districts will have access to three grants under the fund: the Rural Business Growth Fund, the Rural Culture & Creativity Fund and the Rural Communities Fund. Eligible projects include net-zero developments, agriculture and farm diversification, visitor economy business expansion as well as SME investment and diversification or investment in community facilities in our rural areas. Small businesses are so important to our district, and I would encourage them to visit our website to check eligibility and explore details of these grants.

Mid Suffolk has recently responded to a Suffolk Mind survey which identified Stowmarket and surrounding areas as an 'emotional and physical needs hotspot', by awarding £50,000 to local projects supporting residents' wellbeing. We launched the IP14 Wellbeing Fund and have now allocated £50,000 in funding through Suffolk County Council's Public Mental Health programme to ten local projects. This will allow them to do more important work in this area and support more people. We will continue to work with partners to address wellbeing issues in our district, so people can lead active and healthy lives.

As leader I represent the district on various regional and national bodies. In the last few weeks I have attended meetings of the East of England Local Government Association (EELGA), the District Councils' Network where I sit on the executive board, the New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership (NALEP) where I am a director representing Suffolk's district councils, and next week I will be attending the Suffolk Public Sector Leaders' group.

Yesterday we received the fantastic news that part one of our Joint Local Plan has finally been declared sound by the inspector so can I congratulate all the officers and members who have worked so long and hard to get us to this point, and we look forward to seeing the policies in the JLP make a positive impact.

Finally, many of you will have seen the news that Babergh Council leader Dave Busby is taking a temporary step back while he receives treatment for cancer. I'm sure all members will join with me in wishing him a speedy recovery and we hope to see him back soon.

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

35.1 None received.

36 QUESTIONS BY THE PUBLIC IN ACCORDANCE WITH COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULES

36.1 None received.

37 QUESTIONS BY COUNCILLORS IN ACCORDANCE WITH COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULES

37.1 None received.

38 RECOMMENDATIONS FROM CABINET / COMMITTEES

39 MC/23/13 ANNUAL TREASURY MANAGEMENT REPORT - 2022/23

39.1 The Chair invited Councillor Matthissen, Joint Chair of the Joint Audit and Standards Committee, to introduce the report.

39.2 Councillor Matthissen gave an overview of the report and moved the recommendations. Councillor Patchett seconded the motion.

39.3 Councillor Caston referred to the environmental implications in the report and questioned the Joint Audit and Standard Committee's recommendation to Cabinet to filter investments through ESG, and the Joint Audit and Standards Committee's recognition that any decision to withdraw funds should be balanced against financial prudence. Councillor Matthissen responded that this referred to the new administration wanting to align their investments with the Council's priorities towards the environment and climate change. He added that the committee were going to consider a report at their next meeting on ESG to review the financing and how the reduction of value in investments has had an impact.

39.4 Councillor Overett questioned whether the Council had any investments in fossil fuels. The Corporate Manager – Finance, Commissioning and Procurement responded that Appendix C listed the areas that the Council had funds in and however there was not a breakdown in the spread of these investments.

39.5 Councillor Eburne stated that a report on ESG considerations had been pushed for by the Council to the treasury advisors for a long time and that it should be ensured that any changes made to this need the financial considerations fully evaluated. Additionally, the short-term borrowing from the council was extensive and due to increasing interest rates these needed to be greatly monitored.

By a unanimous vote.

It was RESOLVED:-

1.1 That the treasury management activity for the year 2022/23 as set out in this report and appendices be noted.

1.2 That it be noted that both Councils activity was in accordance with the approved Prudential Indicators for 2022/23.

- 1.3 That it be noted that Mid Suffolk District Council's treasury management activity for 2022/23 was in accordance with the approved Treasury Management Strategy, and that, except for one occasion when the Council exceeding 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.

40 MC/23/14 CAPITAL INVESTMENT FUND COMPANY (CIFCO CAPITAL LTD) BUSINESS TRADING AND PERFORMANCE REPORT

- 40.1 The Chair invited Councillor Winch, Cabinet Member for Housing and Property to introduce report MC/23/14.
- 40.2 Councillor Winch gave an overview of the report and proposed the recommendations in the report. Councillor Eburne seconded this motion.
- 40.3 Councillor Whitehead questioned the portfolio transactions relating to the 10 rent reviews and whether the capital losses were overstated based on these reviews. The Director Strategic Asset Management JLL responded that the valuation reflected a point in time and that evidence had been created to support a higher value and this was active asset management to increase income.
- 40.4 Councillor Scarff queried whether a change in the investment guidelines would be possible, or if the guidelines were fixed to the length of the portfolio. The Director – Assets and Investments responded that the guidelines were set up when the portfolio was initially set up and these could be amended in the future to reflect the current market and circumstances if CIFCO were seeking properties again.
- 40.5 Councillor Caston commented that CIFCO was a great legacy for the Council, that the management of the portfolio was excellent and that he was impressed by the EPC improvement works.
- 40.6 Councillor Mellen thanked Councillor Winch for his introduction to the report. He outlined that CIFCO was an inherited responsibility and that in the future it would be reviewed but would not be withdrawn. Clarity on both the rewards and the risks of CIFCO were required. Short-term borrowing within CIFCO was a risk due to interest rates, however this was not a reflection on how the company was run.
- 40.7 Councillor Whitehead welcomed the highlighting of the unrealised capital losses. He further commented on the interest rates and the potential of profit from the Council in Gateway 14 without taking on long-term borrowing that could be affected by a crash in interest rates.
- 40.8 Councillor Eburne highlighted that as the administration had inherited CIFCO they were reviewing how it was working and how it could be improved. In future the timing of the business plan should be brought forward.

Additionally, as a lot of the funds come from short-term borrowing this needed to be monitored due to the rise in interest rates.

- 40.9 Councillor Winch summarised that whilst the administration did not fully agree with CIFCO they had to be realistic that they had inherited a property company that was well run, however this would be shaped in the future to be in line with the new administration's principles.

By a unanimous vote.

It was RESOLVED: -

- 1.1 That Council notes CIFCO Capital Ltd trading activity and performance for the year to 31st March 2023.**
- 1.2 That Council approves CIFCO Capital Ltd's 2023/24 business plan for adoption by CIFCO Capital Limited.**

41 EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC (WHICH TERM INCLUDES THE PRESS)

The meeting was not required to go into closed session.

42 RESTRICTED APPENDIX - CIFCO CAPITAL LTD BUSINESS PLAN (EXEMPT INFORMATION BY VIRTUE OF PARAGRAPH 3 OF PART 1)

The meeting was not required to go into closed session.

43 RE-ADMITTANCE OF THE PUBLIC (WHICH TERM INCLUDES THE PRESS)

44 MC/23/15 MID SUFFOLK STATE OF THE DISTRICT REPORT 2023

- 44.1 The Chair invited the Leader of the Council, Councillor Mellen to introduce the report.
- 44.2 Councillor Mellen introduced the report and moved the recommendations as set out in the report. Councillor Teresa Davis seconded this motion.
- 44.3 Councillor Warboys queried whether there was any information on the progression of students under the age of 18 in the report. The Corporate Manager – Strategic Policy responded that this information was not currently in the report but could be considered going forward.
- 44.4 Councillor Linder questioned whether the number residents per GP could be included in the report as this would be helpful in terms of planning considerations. The Corporate Manager – Strategic Policy responded that health infrastructure needs, and this information could be looked into and how signposting to existing information could be incorporated into future state of the district reports.

- 44.5 Councillor Winch suggested that it would be useful under the housing section of the report to have a focus on affordability with a comparison of average salaries in the district and average rents, and the availability of proportion of housing is available under the local housing allowance.
- 44.6 Councillor Hicks suggested that when the report was published on the website that a link to the Suffolk Observatory be included as it was a source for much of the data, and it is updated frequently.
- 44.7 Councillor Row queried whether it would be possible where figures are separated by gender that they include figures on non-binary people, in line with the most recent census. The Research and Insight Lead stated that this could be included going forward.
- 44.8 Councillor Overett questioned why the tree canopy cover of 8.5% was significantly lower than the national average of 16.3%. Councillor Mellen responded that the Council had undertaken a tree canopy survey, and this had highlighted that Mid Suffolk was behind other districts. This was something that the Council wanted to improve on, and that work was ongoing by the County Council, farmers, and community groups in order to improve tree cover across the district.
- 44.9 Councillor Pratt stated that due to a lot of the land in Mid Suffolk being agricultural land there was a greater dispersion in tree coverage. He suggested that gaps in hedgerows should be filled in to allow for stronger wildlife corridors and that work needed to be done with private landowners, and on council land, in order to improve tree coverage.
- 44.10 Councillor Whitehead endorsed the report and stated that he was heartened to see the reduction of 36% in emissions between 2005 and 2021, and the decrease of 39% in domestic emissions. However, whilst domestically 99% of residents had central heating, three quarters of residents used oil and gas which provided a challenge to the Council in moving towards net zero.
- 44.11 Councillor Davis highlighted whilst most residents lived in homes they owned in low crime areas, there were still residents who were over 66 and living on their own, people with difficulty accessing a GP, vulnerable groups that do not have access to the internet and 20% of children in the district living in poverty, with 100 being homeless. She added that these figures showed a stark contrast and showed where work should be done.
- 44.12 Councillor Mellen outlined that the information contained in the report was useful and outlined the scale of the challenges in areas that needed improvement. It also sets out a direction of travel for the new administration.

By a unanimous vote.

It was RESOLVED: -

To note the content of the Mid Suffolk State of the District Report 2023 and endorse its publication on the Councils' website during October 2023.

45 MC/23/16 APPOINTMENT OF POLITICAL ASSISTANTS

- 45.1 The Chair invited the Corporate Manager – Governance and Civic Office to introduce the report.
- 45.2 Councillor Mellen proposed the recommendation as set out in the report. Councillor Stringer seconded this motion.
- 45.3 Councillor Caston asked for clarification on the allocations for qualifying groups. The Corporate Manager – Governance and Civic Office responded that a post would be allocated to each qualifying political group, however groups were not required to appoint to this role.
- 45.4 Councillor Mellen outlined that political assistants were common throughout local government and whilst Mid Suffolk had not had them previously, they had been requested by the new administration. The rules surrounding the appointments were strict and the role was politically restricted and limited to the length of the council term, and the position should be appointed to on a part time basis. He added that the role would help Members of political groups to fulfil their role by providing information, researching ideas, finding best practice in other councils, and providing support, communication, and organisation to the group. It had been agreed across the administration that a part time political assistant would help them be better Councillors and therefore would benefit the district.
- 45.5 Councillor Whitehead enquired whether the Independent Remuneration Panel would be reviewing Cabinet Member allowances following the appointment of political assistants to run group meetings and research.
- 45.6 Councillor Hicks stated that political assistants were used in the County Council and were invaluable, and due to the size of Mid Suffolk District Council a part time assistant was proportionate. However, it may be better value for money for the Council to instead appoint more Cabinet members.
- 45.7 Councillor Eburne highlighted that political assistants would primarily be used for researching best practice at other councils, and that many district councils across the country used political assistants, such as East Suffolk. The appointment of a political assistant would be a cost of £20,000 per year, and that currently for the new administration there had been a saving of £24,000 per year with £12,000 coming from a reduced Cabinet.
- 45.8 Councillor Scarff stated that most posts across the Councils are shared posts and that if Babergh District Council had also agreed to have political assistants it would have provided more legitimacy, especially in groups where there are fewer Members. He added that in a group of four there is seen to be less of a need for a political assistant as they may only need to be required once a week.

- 45.9 Councillor Stringer outlined that researchers would be beneficial for researching facts, best practice and accurate details and giving access to this for all groups would aid democracy. Additionally, a political assistant would be beneficial in order to identify legislative changes from central government and inform Councillors on how they affect ongoing work. They could also help inform motions on notice to Council and questioning.
- 45.10 Councillor Mellen highlighted that the appointment of political assistants would increase the quality of work done by the Council, and the quality of debate. Additionally, the appointments and their cost could be reviewed in the future, but the proposed appointments should not have any additional cost to the Council or council taxpayers.

With 24 votes For and 5 Against.

It was RESOLVED:-

- 1.1 That the principle of appointing political assistants within the framework of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989, with effect from the Annual Council meeting 2023 until the Annual Council meeting following the full council election in 2027 be approved. (Agreement to the principle would not commit the Groups, or in effect the Group Leaders, to making appointments, but would establish the framework within which such appointments could be made).
- 1.2 That the procedure detailed in the report be followed, should a political group wish to make an appointment.
- 1.3 That the Monitoring Officer be authorised to make the necessary amendments to the Constitution.

46 COUNCILLOR APPOINTMENTS

46.1 The appointments as set out in the tabled papers were proposed by Councillor Mellen. Councillor Mansel seconded the recommendation.

By a unanimous vote.

It was RESOLVED:-

That Councillor Tim Weller be appointed to the Suffolk Safer and Stronger Communities Board.

47 MOTIONS ON NOTICE

47.1 There were no motions on notice.

The business of the meeting was concluded at 7.07 pm.

.....Chair