

MID SUFFOLK DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of the **MID SUFFOLK OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held in the King Edmund Chamber, Endeavour House, 8 Russell Road, Ipswich on Monday, 20 November 2023

PRESENT:

Councillor: James Caston (Chair)
Keith Scarff (Vice-Chair)

Councillors: Terence Carter Janet Pearson
Dr Ross Piper

In attendance:

Councillors: Rachel Eburne – Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources
John Matthissen
John Whitehead

Officers: Director – Corporate Resources (ME)
Lead Officer – Overview and Scrutiny (AN)

1 APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTIONS

1.1 Apologies were received from Councillor Miles Row.

2 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS BY COUNCILLORS

2.1 None declared.

3 TO RECEIVE NOTIFICATION OF PETITIONS IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE COUNCIL'S PETITION SCHEME

3.1 None received.

4 QUESTIONS BY THE PUBLIC

4.1 None received.

5 QUESTIONS BY COUNCILLORS

5.1 None received.

6 MOS/23/01 DRAFT GENERAL FUND (GF) 2024/25 ASSUMPTIONS

6.1 Councillor Rachel Eburne, the Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources, introduced the item to the Committee outlining before Members an overview of the assumptions made, the expected changes for costs of services,

consideration for potential changes in funding, income, and business rates, the new administration's priorities, and the decrease in inflation levels.

- 6.2 Councillor Scarff questioned about the assumed 4% for costs of the Shared Legal Service and whether these costs were sufficient. The Director for Corporate Resources responded that these costs had been put forward by the Shared Legal Service.
- 6.3 Councillor Scarff queried if the Shared Revenues Partnership were able to deliver the services expected considering the amount of vacancies in the team. The Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources responded that the Shared Revenues Partnership was constantly reviewing officer workload and were able to manage with vacancies.
- 6.4 Councillor Scarff further questioned if the decision to not top-slice to the Suffolk Public Sector Leaders Group (SPSLG) was a unilateral decision. The Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources responded that a decision would be made by all the local authorities involved in the SPSLG and that there was a high probability that this decision would be actioned.
- 6.5 Councillor Caston asked for clarification on the assumption that there would be a reduction in income from planning and development management. The Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources responded that there was a current nationwide "slow-down" concerning building infrastructure and properties and so it was assumed there would be a loss of planning income to the Councils over the next financial year.
- 6.6 Councillor Carter questioned if there were reasons why the income received from developments at Gateway 14 were not incorporated into the assumptions report. The Director for Corporate Resources responded that work was being undertaken to assess the size of the Gateway 14 dividend to the Council and that this value would be incorporated into future assumption reviews of draft budgets.
- 6.7 Councillor Matthissen queried if there was any investment planned for policies and strategies that would reduce usage of gas, electricity, and fuel and minimise these costs. The Director for Corporate Resources responded that an answer would be provided to Councillor Matthissen outside of the meeting.
- 6.8 Councillor Whitehead questioned whether business rates would be affected by the valuation office waiting for units on Gateway 14 to be occupied before carrying out evaluations. The Director for Corporate Resources responded that when these evaluations take place the business rates would be backdated to when the properties were first occupied so there would be no impact.
- 6.9 Councillor Whitehead further queried if there would be an annualised effect on business rates due to some infrastructure sites only being occupied for half a year e.g. Port One in Great Blakenham and whether this could be built

into the assumptions model going forward. The Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources responded that once the figures were realised these would be presented within the upcoming annual assumptions reports.

6.10 Councillor Caston questioned why there was so much uncertainty regarding the New Homes Bonus. The Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources responded that the New Homes Bonus is now reviewed and renewed on a one-year basis and that the Councils were unable to confirm until late December whether this Bonus would still be awarded this year.

6.11 Members debated the item on issues including:

- The benefits of Overview and Scrutiny reviewing the assumptions ahead of the draft budgets being considered by the committee in January;
- The uncertainty of the New Homes Bonus;
- The fairness of the assumptions made;
- The accessibility of the information provided

6.12 Councillor Scarff proposed the recommendation as listed in the report.

6.13 Councillor Piper seconded the proposal.

By a unanimous vote

It was RESOLVED:

1.1. That the draft budget assumptions as set out in the report for the 2024/25 General Fund budget be noted.

7 MOS/23/02 FORTHCOMING DECISIONS LIST

7.1 No comments.

8 MOS/23/03 MSDC OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PLAN

8.1 The Lead Officer for Overview and Scrutiny advised Members that the Babergh Overview and Scrutiny Committee had agreed to add an item to their work plans concerning officer productivity and agile working and asked the committee to make a decision as to whether this item would be considered jointly.

8.2 The committee agreed to add this item to the Mid Suffolk work plans and that the consideration of this topic would be held at a Joint Overview and Scrutiny meeting in the new year.

The business of the meeting was concluded at 14:58pm.

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Chair