

## MID SUFFOLK COUNCIL CABINET MEMBER UPDATE

<b>From: Councillor David Burn Cabinet Member for Environment</b>	<b>Report Number: CMU5</b>
<b>To: Council</b>	<b>Date of meeting: 21 December 2017</b>

### TO PROVIDE AN UPDATE FROM THE CABINET MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENT

#### 1. Overview of Portfolio

- 1.1 The Environment Portfolio covers several distinct service areas. This report provides a snapshot and summary of recent work.

#### 2. Recommendation

- 2.1 That Council notes the report.

#### 3. Key Activities/Issues Over the Past Six Months

##### *Waste Service*

- 3.1 Our Commercial Waste service continues to grow, building on the previous good work of the team. As at the end of quarter 2 in this financial year we have attracted 36 net new customers equivalent to an additional £55,000 annualised income.
- 3.2 The Garden Waste service now has over 14,500 homes subscribed, which is an increase of over 1,000 customers on the previous year.
- 3.3 Our recycling rate, National Indicator 192, was 47.92% for Quarter 2 which compares with 48.59% for 2016/17. The small reduction this year is probably because fines (see below) such as bottle tops are no longer included in the recycling figure. The issue of contamination in the dry recycling waste stream continues to be a problem for the Suffolk Waste Partnership. The current average monthly contamination rate across Suffolk is 11.64% (April–Oct 2017), the MSDC average for the period is 7.21%. The data is collated from samples taken from vehicle loads delivered either directly to the MRF or to waste transfer stations.
- 3.4 Food waste, glass, and fines (material that is below 45mm) continue to be the main contaminants found in recycling bins. The Suffolk Waste Partnership is currently undertaking door knocking and educational campaign trials in Ipswich and Lowestoft to explore a more targeted approach to this issue; early indications are that this is having a positive impact on reducing contamination levels. The intention is to expand the campaign throughout the county in the coming months.
- 3.5 We are working with our service provider Serco on planning for growth across our joint waste contract. This work involves a review of our current collection rounds across both districts, ensuring that the rounds are as efficient and effective as possible and allowing for both current and future housing growth. The work is in its early stages, but any changes will be implemented during 2018.

### *Sustainable Environment Service*

- 3.6 Highways England is undertaking a national project to install electric vehicle charging points across the strategic road network; in Suffolk this would include the A11, A14 and A12. Officers from BMSDC are leading on a project to obtain a 100% grant from Highways England to create a network of rapid-charging points every 20 miles along these key trunk roads. We have prepared a joint bid on behalf of nine other local authorities in Suffolk, Norfolk and Essex, which will cover all procurement and administration costs for the project (including our officer's time). Highways England has indicated its intention to approve the bid, although we are awaiting formal confirmation. A charging point at Needham lakes is being scoped for suitability. The charging points will generate income due to the predicted exponential growth in the uptake of electric vehicles (90% of all vehicles in the UK by 2050).
- 3.7 We are currently working on a programme to convert around 100 replacement street and car park lights with LEDs in Mid Suffolk, which will reduce the annual running costs by £3,300 (a 72% saving, and a return on the investment costs of around 9%).
- 3.8 Eastern England Energy Strategy – The Suffolk Climate Change Partnership is playing a key role in the development of a joint Eastern England Energy Strategy (across the New Anglia, Greater Cambridge-Greater Peterborough and Hertfordshire LEPs). Funding for this work was secured from the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy earlier in the year. The strategic priority is to accelerate enterprise, skills, inward investment and innovation to enable local growth in energy demand and supply. The strategy will develop the East's response to key areas of the Industrial Strategy's priority areas of affordable energy, changes to energy infrastructure and securing the industrial opportunities for the UK economy of energy innovation. A draft strategy for local authority endorsement is due in Spring 2018.
- 3.9 Warm Homes Fund – Through membership of the Suffolk Climate Change Partnership (SCCP) we are seeking to further extend our offer to homeowners, by submitting a joint bid for money from the Warm Homes Fund (a £150 million fund announced by National Grid and Community Interest Company Affordable Warmth Solutions) to deliver first time central heating systems and gas connections to 540 fuel poor households in Suffolk.
- 3.10 The project would be delivered over a three-year period and has a value of £4.3 million. We have submitted two bids to deliver: first time condensing gas boiler central heating systems and gas connections to 230 households in urban areas (urban is defined as within 2km of a gas main); and first time condensing oil boiler central heating systems or air source heat pumps to 310 households in rural areas (rural is defined as more than 2km from a gas main). Additional insulation measures, cavity wall and loft insulation, would also be delivered to these households to achieve a 'whole house' approach.
- 3.11 The grant being sought from the fund is £2,776,800, with £1,569,930 of 'match' funding from existing schemes including the Energy Company Obligation, Fuel Poor Network Extension Scheme, Suffolk's Warm Homes Healthy People, Suffolk Community Foundation Surviving Winter Fuel Payments and local authority renovation grants. The SCCP has received positive feedback from the Warm Homes Fund, although we are awaiting formal confirmation of an award.

- 3.12 BEE Anglia (Business Energy Efficiency Anglia) – Through our membership of the Suffolk Climate Change Partnership (SCCP), Mid Suffolk businesses have benefited from the BEE Anglia programme to provide free support to at least 1,000 SMEs across Suffolk and Norfolk to help them become more energy efficient. The Partnership successfully bid for £6.5M of funding from the EU European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) for this 3-year programme of support and grants to businesses. Since the programme began in April 2016, 33 businesses in Mid Suffolk have received free audits, which have identified measures that are projected to achieve energy bill savings of £79,600 and save 364 tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions.

*Food and Safety Service*

- 3.13 New Anglia Better Business for All (BBfA) Programme – This is a partnership between all the Norfolk and Suffolk local authorities, the New Anglia LEP and Growth Hub and various business organisations that was formed to improve the way in which regulators and businesses interact. Babergh/Mid Suffolk is the lead local authority partner working with BEIS (Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy).
- 3.14 The partnership has been awarded funding by both Suffolk and Norfolk local authorities. Part of this funding has enabled the appointment of a project manager for two years hosted by Babergh and Mid Suffolk.
- 3.15 In November 2017, the BBfA Programme ran four launch workshops, for regulatory officers, held in Ipswich and Norwich. These were attended by more than 200 who learned about the support that is available to businesses in Suffolk and Norfolk from the LEP, the Growth Hub, the Department for Trade and Industry (exports), ACAS and MENTA as well as hearing from BEIS about communicating with businesses, providing the tools to add value to interactions with businesses. BMSDC staff from the planning, sustainable environment, building control, food and safety and Open for Business teams attended the workshops.
- 3.16 Eat Out Eat Well and Take Out Eat Well Awards – The Suffolk district and borough councils, working with the SCC public health team, introduced a healthy catering award in 2015/16, celebrating the 100th Suffolk Eat Out Eat Well Award at the beginning of November 2017. BMSDC continues to take a lead in developing the award with the public health team. At the end of November 2017 we began piloting a simplified version of the award (Take Out Eat Well) for take-away food outlets, working with businesses in Babergh and Mid Suffolk.
- 3.17 Business as Usual – The Food Safety service plan identified 538 planned inspections of food premises for the year. By the end of the first half of 2017/18 we had carried out 292 inspections, which put us ahead of schedule at that stage.

### *Licensing Service*

- 3.18 We are redesigning the service, and trialling how to share workload effectively and fairly across the team, with business needs remaining front and central to how we do that. The team is using the new Customer Access Points to deliver front facing elements of the service (identity, right to work, criminal and medical checks etc.) which are vital for safeguarding the public.
- 3.19 Business activity in the taxi licensing sector is consistently high. The team has worked successfully to expediently remove licences of two drivers being investigated for relevant offences.
- 3.20 New premises are also opening and existing premises diversifying in relation to event, alcohol, entertainment and late-night refreshment licensing areas. We are still operating on reduced capacity ahead of recruiting in the new year (following the resignation of two key officers over the past 6 months). Despite this the team has stepped up admirably in difficult circumstances, given the need to continue front-facing business support for two districts and at the same time coping with our office moves.
- 3.21 The Licensing & Regulatory Committees have reviewed central government proposals to change (reduce) stakes for fixed odds betting terminals (available in high street bookmakers), which have been linked to problem gambling, money laundering and issues in more deprived communities. The media popularly report these gaming machines as being the 'crack cocaine of gaming machines' (the stake can be £100 every 20 seconds). This is not a prevalent problem in either Mid Suffolk or Babergh but there is still a social responsibility and Licensing Committee interest. A response to government is being drafted by the team.
- 3.22 The Committee also explored some of the issues surrounding recent deregulatory matters in the taxi and private hire sector, particularly safety issues and public awareness concerns arising from cross-border hiring relaxations. As usual there is a fine balance to be struck between public protection principles and business/consumer flexibility.
- 3.23 The full Licensing team also attended in support of the New Anglia Better Business for All launch in Ipswich earlier in November (see paragraph 3.15). The team has represented BMSDC at county level in relation to improving how the safety review of public outdoor events operates. We begin the new 2018 event season BMSDC review meetings from January 2018.

### *Building Control Service*

- 3.24 Our Building Control service had a change in management in September of this year following the retirement of the Building Control Corporate Manager and the appointment of a replacement. We also saw the loss of a further two surveyors but have successfully recruited replacements who are due to start in post at the end of January 2018.
- 3.25 Although the Building Control team continues to perform well it faces several challenges with increased competition from Approved Inspectors, it is essential to become more commercially aware as a service both to retain current levels of business and to grow the service.

An option currently being explored is a strategic, collaborative working approach across all Suffolk building control teams under a single identity and a shared vision. Work is now being undertaken, in conjunction with other Suffolk authorities, to identify key areas in the market place where work is being lost and to develop a Suffolk-wide business plan to address these issues.

#### *Planning Enforcement Service*

- 3.26 The Planning Enforcement service has experienced resource issues over the past 6 months with the loss of two experienced officers. Within a team of 5.2 full-time-equivalent operational officers, two vacant posts is a significant proportion of our resource. Recruitment is currently being undertaken to fill these vacant positions.
- 3.27 The team has also experienced several issues with the transfer of data from the previous Accolade IT system to the new IDOX 'Uniform' IT system. We have been unable to access historical information for a period of time between the changes in the IT systems, which has created further challenges. This data has recently been transferred but needs to be quality checked for accuracy.

#### *Heritage Service*

- 3.28 The Victorian Society has recently ranked the buildings at the former Fisons site in Bramford among the top ten listed Buildings-at-Risk in England and Wales. Although the Council has granted planning permission and listed building consent for the repair and reuse of the buildings within a scheme that includes a significant housing development, there are questions over its viability because of the scale and nature of the site and buildings and its former industrial use. We have been in discussion with the owners to 'unblock' the barriers to redevelopment. In October we submitted a bid to the Housing Communities Agency/DCLG for £6.472m from the Housing Infrastructure Fund to assist in the delivery of the infrastructure needed to unblock and support redevelopment of the site. We await a decision on the bid in the new year.
- 3.29 Like Planning Enforcement, the Heritage team has experienced a number of challenges as a result of the change in the IT system. When Development Management migrated from Accolade to IDOX 'Uniform' a significant backlog of consultation responses occurred. It was also identified that the new Uniform system is unable to allocate tasks as required and officers have had to adapt using another existing system as well as the Uniform system. This difficulty has been compounded because the team is also two full officers short due to vacancies. The vacant posts have been advertised; some candidates who seem promising on paper have applied but we are unlikely to have people in post until February.

#### *Public Realm Service*

- 3.30 Public Realm Transformation – The first draft report from consultants WYG was received in September. The report highlights the excellent and value-for-money work that is delivered by Mid Suffolk's in-house grounds maintenance and street cleansing teams. Standards were assessed by a number of inspections and the district was given an overall rating of good. The report along with a number of options to take forward the transformation project is being considered by a task-and-finish panel and will be considered by Cabinet in February.

3.31 Pikes Meadow, Stowmarket – Over the past few years a partnership between the Council, the Friends of Pikes Meadow and Stowmarket Town Council has been developing proposals for a new play site at Pikes Meadow. The new play site was officially opened by the Leader of the Council on 15 July. It has been very popular with young people and their parents and has developed greatly the amenity that this important local recreation has to offer. The Friends group is already planning future additions to the site, such as a roundabout that can be used by wheelchair users.