

MID SUFFOLK DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of the **MID SUFFOLK CABINET** held in the King Edmund Chamber, Endeavour House, 8 Russell Road, Ipswich on Monday, 4 December 2017 at 2:30pm

PRESENT:

Councillor: John Whitehead – Chairman

Councillors:	Gerard Brewster	David Burn
	Julie Flatman	Glen Horn
	Penny Otton	Andrew Stringer
		David Whybrow

In attendance:

Councillor Roy Barker
Councillor Rachel Eburne
Councillor Diana Kearsley
Councillor John Matthissen
Councillor Suzie Morley
Councillor Keith Welham

Chief Executive (AC)
Corporate Business Improvement Manager (KC)
Economic Development Officer (DC)
Corporate Manager – Finance (ME)
Assistant Director - Environment and Commercial Partnerships (CF)
Corporate Business Co-ordinator (SM)
Corporate Manager - Strategic Asset Management (JP)
Corporate Manager – Democratic Services (JR)
Project and Research Officer (JS)
Assistant Director – Finance (KS)
Strategic Director (JS)

51 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors Gowrley and Osborne.

52 TO RECEIVE ANY DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY OR NON-PECUNIARY INTEREST BY COUNCILLORS

There were none.

53 MCA/17/27 - CONFIRMATION OF THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 6 NOVEMBER 2017

The minutes of the meeting held on 6 November 2017 were confirmed as a correct

record.

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

There were none.

55 QUESTIONS BY COUNCILLORS

55.1 The following questions from Councillors had been received:

55.2 Councillor John Matthissen to Councillor Whitehead:

"How many members of staff have left since 1st January 2017 and, assuming we conduct exit interviews as is best practice, how many of these have given the move to Ipswich as a reason?"

Councillor Whitehead responded:

"Thank you for your question. The Half-Yearly Performance Reporting paper on today's agenda includes a new measure on page 111 that shows the number of staff leavers for the period 1st April to 30th September 2017. You will see that there were 20 leavers in the first quarter and 38 in the second quarter. Of this total of 58, 16 stated the move as the reason for leaving. Three due to the move to Stowmarket and the other 13 due to the move to Endeavour House. This does not quite cover the time period that you requested, but is the current information available and will continue to be included in future performance reports."

Councillor Matthissen then asked a supplementary question as to whether the first two quarters of the year could be reconciled in addition to high staff turnover. Councillor Whitehead explained the 16 leavers whom had stated the reason for leaving was the move were not in addition to the response to question 5.

55.3 Councillor John Matthissen to Councillor Wilshaw

"During 2017/18 how many private sector empty homes have been returned to occupancy as a result of council intervention, and what is the estimate of the number currently empty across the District?"

Councillor Wilshaw responded:

"31 homes have been returned to occupancy in the first two quarters of 2017/18

The current number of empty properties stands at:

- 182 properties: empty 6 months to 2 years
- 71 properties: 2 years+"

55.4 Councillor Matthissen then asked a supplementary question regarding the numbers being high and whether any resource had been put into lowering this figure. Also did

the Council have any power to ensure occupancy rather than being left empty in extreme cases? Councillor Wilshaw explained although there may be the incentive, the Council did not have the powers in terms of the Private Sector. It may be possible to take some action, dependant on the nature and condition of the property, but this was the exception rather than the rule.

55.5 Councillor John Matthissen to Councillor Wilshaw

“Can the weekly void sheet show the average void days for re-let properties?”

Councillor Wilshaw responded:

“The Voids Working Sheet is sent to Mid Suffolk members. It is just a working sheet which shows current void properties, forthcoming voids and those ready to let. This document is used by officers at Voids Meetings and by the different teams involved in the voids process.

The idea of members receiving it was so they can see what vacancies there are in their wards. Re-let times are calculated on a different document and performance reported on a quarterly basis. As part of introducing a Void Project from December average void times will be reported monthly during the project, between December 2017 and May 2018.”

Councillor Matthissen responded by saying he thought as the document was produced on a spreadsheet it would automatically calculate the average void days for re-let properties.

55.6 Councillor Penny Otton to Councillor Wilshaw

“What has been the rent loss, and the Council Tax costs as a result of voids in Mid Suffolk for the year 2016/17 and from April 2017 to date?”

Councillor Wilshaw responded:

“The rent loss as a result of properties being empty and rent not being charged in the year 16/17 was - £195,377. For this year 17/18 (Apr – Sept) the figure is £100,284

The cost of paying Council Tax on empty properties was £44,567 in the year 16/17, we haven’t as yet collected data for the year to date.”

Councillor Otton was concerned about the last statement of year to date figures being part of the HRA. Councillor Wilshaw explained the data was being kept up to date, however, in respect of Council Tax these figures would be produced in due course.

55.7 Councillor John Matthissen to Councillor Gowrley

“What is the urgency to pursue merger when the councils are already attempting to deal with multiple exceptional issues such as the move to Ipswich, high staff

turnover and vacancies, lack of a 5 year land supply and at least five development projects on our own account in Mid Suffolk alone.”

Councillor Whitehead (in Councillor Gowrley’s absence) responded:

“It is of course our role as a Council to be able to do more than one thing at a time. Progress on introducing a Joint Local Plan remains on track and this is the substantive way of addressing the 5 year land supply issue. We have had an increase in staff turnover as a result of recent office moves but this was relatively small (16 people) and work is now complete; and so I expect we will return to more usual turnover and vacancy levels.

It is a fundamental part of our role though to plan for the future. With this in mind it is essential that we look now at what the council should look like for the future. It was with this in mind that we asked the Chief Executive to look at our options. The Cabinets have formed an initial view that dissolving the existing Councils to form a new District Council appears to be the most viable and preferable solution. This question of whether Mid Suffolk and Babergh should form a new Council has however been around since 2011 and could not happen before 2019 at the very earliest. I therefore believe that it is right that we are looking at these issues now; but we are doing so in a proper and measured manner, that subject to Babergh Cabinet this week, will move on to a period of comprehensive engagement with all Councillors, Towns & Parishes, Electors, Stakeholders and Staff.”

- 55.8 Councillor Matthissen stated he still did not understand the urgency from the answer given and questioned whether the process was being conducted in a measured way.

Councillor John Matthissen to Councillor Gowrley

“Why was the September council meeting cancelled, without the Chairman’s agreement, at a time of great difficulty for the council, and consequent concern of members?”

Councillor Whitehead (in Councillor Gowrley’s absence) responded:

“The meeting of the Full Council scheduled for 21 September 2017 was cancelled due to a lack of formal substantive business for the Council to consider. The Leader and Chairman’s agreement was sought for this cancellation. It was imperative to give all Councillors early notification of the cancellation and despite several attempts to contact the Chairman it was not possible to gain his agreement before the cancellation notification was sent.”

Councillor Matthissen gave thanks for the response.

- 55.9 **Councillor John Matthissen to Councillor Whitehead**

“Why have the Green Group never received a complete set of written answers to questions submitted regarding the issue of redundancy notices and related issues?”

Councillor Whitehead responded:

"A written response will be circulated due to the number of questions asked."

55.10 Councillor John Matthissen to Councillor Whitehead

"Why has the departure of our strategic IT Director, Paul Doe, not been reported to members, and what steps have been taken to replace him?"

Councillor Morley – Lead Member for Digital – on behalf of Councillor Horn responded:

"Apologies this was an oversight and should have been reported. However, following his departure the County have put interim arrangements in place, details of these are available if requested."

55.11 Councillor Matthissen retained an underlying unease and wished to receive further details in respect of the IT Strategy. Councillor Morley responded by explaining an organisational chart was available if required and was meeting with the Assistant Director for Customers. She would report back following this meeting.

55.12 Councillor Rachel Eburne to Councillor Horn

"As Members, we are often referred to the Council's intranet site, Connect, for information."

Most of the information about projects is out of date by several months. Indeed the Leisure Strategy, on the Agenda for Monday's Cabinet meeting, is shown as due to be presented to Cabinet in September 2017."

Another example is the implementation of Universal Credit project which hasn't been updated since 17 August and notes a "tbc go live date" for Sudbury despite the fact that this has already happened."

In the Members section it has the 2016/17 meeting timetable and an instruction with links on how to email the Executive Committee but not the Cabinet."

I could list many more."

Please can you advise when Connect will be up to date and we can confidently rely on the contents. Or provide us with an alternative method of understanding particular work and projects."

55.13 Councillor Horn responded:

"Councillor Eburne is absolutely correct in that there are several areas on the project and programme pages and other areas of Connect that require updating. This is designed to be a live reporting tool and so will always be partly out of date but there are key areas where the information can and should be more timely."

We have already identified that it is timely and prudent to review 'how we manage

our programmes and projects' and this is commencing with a workshop of our Senior Leadership team on 24 January. This will look at the presentation of information in relation to the JSP, communication, reporting, roles and responsibilities, the use of Sharepoint to name a few. In the meantime the Business Improvement Officers will continue to support and encourage Corporate Managers and their teams to reinvigorate the use of Connect for the visibility and transparency of key project and programme information."

With regard to the other areas on Connect that Councillor Eburne alludes to, these are the responsibility of the relevant data owners. Your comments on committee meetings have been passed to the new Corporate Manager for Democratic Services, and Corporate Managers have been asked to review their areas asap.

Councillor Eburne felt to say "always partly out of date" was unacceptable. A timescale should be issued as to when Connect would be up to date and until that time she would be directing any queries to either Members themselves or the Assistant Directors. She considered this to be a very poor example of good practice. Councillor Horn agreed and explained now the Assistant Director for Customers was in post he hoped to share good news imminently. There were no timescales to report at present. He would be meeting with the Assistant Director for Customers and following this meeting there not only would be a strategy but also a timetable.

55.14 **Councillor Rachel Eburne to Councillor John Whitehead**

"At Babergh District Council meeting on Tuesday 21 November 2017, Babergh members were provided with staffing costs for both council's pre-integration in 2011 and now. The figures for Mid Suffolk were £9,071,000 then £11,158,000 which is a 23.7% increase. Please can you explain why?"

Please can you also explain why the current figure is £1.6 million more than Babergh's figure?

Also - given we have worked together for over 6 years, why is information like this not shared as a matter of course in an open and transparent way?"

Councillor Whitehead responded:

"Thank you for your question. The total cost for Mid Suffolk in 2011/12 was £9,071k, comprising £8,969k on payroll and £102k off-payroll costs. In 2016/17 the equivalent figures were a total of £11,158k comprising £9,965k on payroll and £1,193k off-payroll costs. There are several reasons why the payroll costs have changed over this period of time and this is shown in the table below:

<u>ANALYSIS OF MID SUFFOLK PAYROLL COSTS</u>	
<u>MOVEMENT FROM 2011/12 TO 2016/17</u>	
	£'000
Total Cost 2011/12	8,969

<u>Movements</u>	
Integration savings in 2012/13 and 2013/14	-1,255
Tri-ennial Pension Fund valuation deficit contribution	517
NPS and CSD staff coming back in house	881
Annual pay awards and incremental progression	969
National Insurance contribution change in 2016/17	151
Savings from adjusting cost sharing with BDC and vacant posts in 2016/17	-267
Total Cost 2016/17	9,965

There has been a steady increase in off-payroll costs each year between 2011/12 and 2016/17, as the Councils integrated the workforce, developed new ways of working and undertook new initiatives to deliver the Joint Strategic Plan, but this trend is expected to reverse in 2017/18, based on costs to date. As you will be aware, Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee will receive an Information Bulletin at its meeting on 18th December about off-payroll costs and you will see more information related to these costs in that bulletin.

Mid Suffolk's total figures are higher than Babergh's at the end of 2016/17 mainly because of the difference in payroll costs of £1.4m. This reflects the different delivery models for services that were in existence last year. Mid Suffolk had an internal Public Realm and Housing Repairs Team, whereas for Babergh these were managed through an external contract. From 1st April 2017 Babergh's Housing Repairs function has transferred back in-house, so their payroll costs will increase this year.

In relation to your last point, I would like to remind you that on 7th December 2016 Lindsay Barker sent an email to all Members of both councils setting out information on staffing costs, following a number of questions about staff savings from integration. The information at that time went up to 2015/16. In response to a question from Cllr John Hinton to Babergh's last Council meeting, the information was updated to include 2016/17 costs. The Mid Suffolk information was updated at the same time and the intention was to share this, but your question was asked at Council on 23rd November before this could happen. The intention from now on is to update this information on an annual basis and share it with all Members."

Councillor Eburne considered there not only had been poor communications to members in relation to staffing costs, she hoped this figure had been included in the budget for this financial year. This was a poor example of working together.

- 55.15 A general question was raised by Councillor Otton asking for clarification as to when the deadline for questions to Cabinet members could be received. The Corporate Manager for Democratic Services explained a section had been omitted from the Constitution on this issue and as such questions would be accepted up until the day before the meeting, however, the closer to the meeting the more likely to receive a written response. The Chief Executive reiterated that Members could ask questions of both Officers and Members at any time of the day of the year, they did not have to wait until Council or Cabinet.

56 MATTERS REFERRED BY THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY OR JOINT AUDIT AND STANDARDS COMMITTEES

- 56.1 Apologies were given as this item had been omitted from the published agenda, as it was a standing item.
- 56.2 Councillor Eburne explained the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had recently discussed the Homelessness Reduction Act. There were concerns as to whether there was sufficient funding to implement act and she requested Cabinet monitored this. Also there were timing issues as the Code of Guidance would be issued in March 2018 which should be implemented on 3 April 2018. The Shared Legal Service would be discussed at the Joint Overview and Scrutiny meeting on 18 December 2017.

57 MCA/17/28 - FORTHCOMING DECISIONS LIST

- 57.1 The Forthcoming Decisions List was noted.
- 57.2 Councillor Otton was disappointed the financial report on the possible merger between Mid Suffolk District Council and Babergh District Council would not be reported at a public meeting of Mid Suffolk. She also questioned whether The Regal in Stowmarket would be coming to a future meeting. Councillor Brewster had received an email from Councillor Gowrley who had indicated a report should be brought before the Mid Suffolk Council meeting on 21 December 2017. This was supported.
- 57.3 In terms of the financial report on the possible merger, the Chief Executive explained these had gone through a Babergh District Council meeting and Babergh Cabinet would also reconsider on 7 December 2017. He agreed this raised a wider point in terms of shared working and as such should have automatically been circulated. Councillor Otton felt there should be a public Mid Suffolk Council meeting in order to give all councillors a chance to debate the issue. The Chief Executive pointed out as the decision had already been made it would only be for information.

58 MCA/17/29 - LEISURE, SPORT AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY STRATEGY

- 58.1 Councillor Kearsley, the Lead Member for Health and Well Being, introduced report MCA/17/19. The recommendation was moved by Councillor Flatman and seconded by Councillor Burn, subject to the corrections and typographical errors being amended.
- 58.2 Members were pleased to receive the report. The delivery plan should now be included on the forward plan and be delivered.
- 58.3 In response to questions raised the Assistant Director for Environment and Commercial Partnerships explained an action plan would be developed as part of the Strategy with an integrated cycling element. Volunteering was very important and the strategic partnership was looking to improve on this. This strategy would be in line with other local strategies, as well as nationally. Negotiations with Stowmarket High School and the County Council had stalled due to Stowmarket

High School turning into an academy.

- 58.4 It was considered that as sports provision was important the delivery strategy would be brought back to a future Cabinet meeting and included on the forthcoming decisions list in due course.

By an unanimous vote.

It was RESOLVED:-

- (1) That the Leisure, Sport and Physical Activity Strategy be endorsed.

Reason for decision: To enable the Council's to adopt a strategic approach towards the provision of Leisure, Sport and Physical Activity.

59 **MCA/17/30 - BABERGH AND MID SUFFOLK ENTERPRISE ZONE SITES - SPACE TO INNOVATE - DISCRETIONARY BUSINESS RATES RELIEF POLICIES**

- 59.1 Councillor Brewster, the Cabinet Member for Economy, introduced report MCA/17/30 and moved the recommendation which was seconded by Councillor Whybrow.
- 59.2 Members noted the tight timescale involved and questioned whether appropriate protocols were in place. Local businesses should be promoted.
- 59.3 Councillor Brewster with support from the Economic Development Officer explained it was a Government supported initiative and the legislation defined the business rates. There were no issues to cause concern and protocols were in place. Local businesses would be treated as a priority, it was a profit for purpose site.

By a vote of 8/1

It was RESOLVED: -

- (1) The Mid Suffolk District Council Discretionary Business Rates Relief Policy for Stowmarket Enterprise Park be approved.
- (2) That the Assistant Directors be approved as alternative signatories on legal documentation in respect of Enterprise Zone site delivery within the District.

Reason for Decisions: To encourage the development of employment sites and other business growth in appropriate locations. To encourage investment in infrastructure.

60 **MCA/17/31 - HALF YEARLY PERFORMANCE REPORTING (APRIL TO SEPTEMBER '17)**

- 60.1 Councillor Horn, the Cabinet member with responsibility for Organisational Delivery, introduced report MCA/17/31 and moved the recommendation which was seconded

by Councillor Brewster.

- 60.2 In response to questions raised Councillor Horn, with the help from the Corporate Business Improvement Manager, explained there had been no change in services. The new Assistant Director for Customers was examining the public access strategy in order to provide a better service. If Councillors were experiencing problems these should be noted for investigation. Staff sickness was being monitored as well as staff vacancies, particularly within planning.

By a vote of 7 to 0 with 2 abstentions.

It was RESOLVED: -

- (1) The performance report and the performance outcome information tabled at Appendices A to E adequately reflects Mid Suffolk's performance for the half year April to September 2017.
- (2) Any actions required were considered where performance improvement was needed.

Reason for Decisions: To agree the Council's performance adequately demonstrates delivery of the Joint Strategic Plan.

61 MCA/17/32 - FINANCIAL MONITORING 2017/18 - QUARTER 2

- 61.1 Councillor Whitehead, the Cabinet Member with responsibility for Finance, introduced report MCA/17/32 and moved the recommendation which was seconded by Councillor Burn.
- 61.2 In response to questions Councillor Whitehead with the support of the Chief Executive explained there had been an improved management structure regarding BMBS Property Services. Both Property Services and Building Control reported to the Assistant Director of Housing. As some Councillors still considered this to be confusing further detail would be given after the meeting.
- 61.3 It was noted staffing was the biggest expense and this would be monitored. There needed to be the right balance of service delivery and staffing costs within budget. Free car parking in Stowmarket over the Christmas period would give the flexibility to encourage shoppers and would not have a significant impact.

By 7 votes to 2.

It was RESOLVED: -

- (1) The potential or likely variations in relation to the General Fund, Housing Revenue Account and Capital Programme compared to the Budget be noted.
- (2) That, subject to any further budget variations that arise during the rest of the financial year, the following net transfers of £1,112k be noted.
 - a) The balance of the General Fund surplus of £932k referred to in

section 11.8 of the report be transferred to the Transformation Fund;

- b) Transfer of £45k, being the favourable variance for Planning legal costs to the earmarked reserve, referred to in section 11.8 of the report;
- c) Transfer of £135k, being the favourable variance for Homelessness to the earmarked grants reserve, referred to in section 11.8 of the report.

Reason for Decisions: To ensure that Members were kept informed of the current budgetary position for both the General Fund and HRA.

62 MCA/17/33 - 2018/19 GENERAL FUND BUDGET - EARLY INDICATION

- 62.1 Councillor Whitehead, the Cabinet Member for Finance, introduced report MCA/17/33 and moved the recommendation which was seconded by Councillor Whybrow.
- 62.2 In response to questions Councillor Whitehead explained meetings would take place with the key people in service areas. The figures in the report still indicated a decline in future revenue costs. Reserves were there as a one off which they did not want to use, the Council should be sustainable in its own right.
- 62.3 It was noted that Councillors from all parties had been invited to put forward ideas for savings.

By an unanimous vote.

It was RESOLVED: -

- (1) That the progress on developing the General Fund Budget for the period 2018/19 to 2021/22 and the intention to increase Council Tax in 2018/19 be noted.

Reason for Decisions: To ensure that Members were aware of the progress being made to set the 2018/19 budgets.

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

RESOLUTION TO EXCLUDE THE PUBLIC

By a unanimous vote

It was RESOLVED:

That pursuant to Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, the public should be excluded from the meeting for the business specified below on the grounds that if the public were present during these items, it was likely there would be the disclosure to them of exempt information as indicated against each item. The authors of the reports proposed to be considered in Part II of the agenda were satisfied that the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighed the public

interest in disclosing the information.

64 **MCA/17/34 - LEASE AGREEMENT**

64.1 The Minute relating to the above mentioned item was excluded from the public record. A summary of the Minute made by the Proper Officer in accordance with sub-section 2 of Section 100(c) of the Local Government Act 1972 was set out below.

64.2 Councillor Whitehead, the Cabinet Member for Finance, introduced report MCA/17/34 and moved the recommendation which was seconded by Councillor Flatman.

The recommendations contained within the report were agreed.

It was RESOLVED: -

1.1 That the lease be granted.

Reason for Decisions: To formalise the tenancy arrangements between Mid Suffolk District Council and the Cedars Park Community Interest Company.

The business of the meeting was concluded at 4:49pm.

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Chairman