

## MID SUFFOLK DISTRICT COUNCIL

<b>From: Cabinet Member, Cllr David Burn</b>	<b>Report Number: MCa/17/53</b>
<b>To: Cabinet</b>	<b>Date of meeting: 5th March 2018</b>

### REPORT TITLE

#### Public Realm Transformation Project

#### 1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To set out the Council's principles for future Public Realm provision in Mid Suffolk.
- 1.2 To outline the findings of the Public Realm Review and endorse a programme of priorities for public realm services for 2018/19, in response to that review.
- 1.3 To agree Member involvement in the further development of public realm provision as part of the future Environment Strategy.

#### 2. Recommendations

- 2.1 To note the findings of the Public Realm Review, including the overall conclusions that standards of street cleansing and grounds maintenance are generally good and that the in-house service in Mid Suffolk represents value for money.
- 2.2 To agree the priority actions for 2018/19, set out at paragraphs 13.1 – 13.4 of this report, to take forward public realm provision within Mid Suffolk.
- 2.3 To agree the principles for future Public Realm provision in Mid Suffolk, outlined at paragraph 12 of this report.
- 2.4 To agree to establish the following four cross-party Member Advisory Task and Finish Groups to:
  - (i) Develop standards and performance measures for public realm services;
  - (ii) Establish a policy for the adoption of open spaces and other public realm assets;
  - (iii) Review and extend the policy on trees; and
  - (iv) Develop a policy on public toilets.
- 2.5 To utilise the public realm principles and public realm policies in the development of both the emerging Environment Strategy and the emerging Communities Strategy.

**REASON FOR DECISIONS: To set out the Council's principles and plans for the future development of public realm services.**

### 3. Financial Implications

- 3.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report. If proposals from the Member Advisory Task and Finish Groups give rise to new financial implications, these will be costed and presented to Cabinet alongside the Groups' recommendations.

### 4. Legal Implications

- 4.1 There are none associated with this report. Any legal implications arising from the work of the Member Advisory Task and Finish Groups will be reported to Cabinet alongside the proposals from these Groups.

### 5. Risk Management

- 5.1 The key risks are set out in the table below. There are no risks in the Corporate Significant Risk Register directly associated with this report.

<b>GENERAL FUND</b>			
<b>Risk Description</b>	<b>Likelihood</b>	<b>Impact</b>	<b>Mitigation Measures</b>
Lack of accurate and comprehensive data, to enable the completion of a robust business case, to determine the future delivery options for public realm services.	2 (Unlikely)	3 (Bad/Serious)	Ensure the appropriate systems and staff resources are in place to collect, monitor and manage key service data.
Insufficient resource to deliver the outcomes of the policy work on trees, public toilets and the adoption of open space and other public realm assets.	2 (Unlikely)	3 (Bad/Serious)	Resource implications of any proposals arising from the policy development work will be identified and reported to Cabinet alongside the recommendations.
Health and safety standards are unable to be met.	2 (Unlikely)	4 (Disaster)	Risk assessments and staff training were updated in February 2018. Ongoing reviews and action will be undertaken by the service area management team.

## **6. Consultations**

- 6.1 During the Public Realm Review, the consultants (White Young Green, known as WYG) consulted councillors, internal officers and external partners, including town councils and those involved in community public realm projects.
- 6.2 There was a cross-party Member Advisory Working Group to support the review and WYG ran a separate dedicated workshop to which all Members were invited.
- 6.3 As well as running workshops for key stakeholders and carrying out some one-to-one interviews, WYG carried out unannounced 'secret shopper' visits to a number of key locations.

## **7. Equality Analysis**

- 7.1 There are no equality issues arising from this report. Any potential changes in policy or service delivery will be assessed at the time and, if needed, an equality impact analysis will be carried out.

## **8. Shared Service / Partnership Implications**

- 8.1 There are no immediate shared service/partnership implications contained within this report.

## **9. Links to Joint Strategic Plan**

- 9.1 A high quality public realm, alongside effective engagement with local communities, links directly to all three priority areas in the Joint Strategic Plan, namely Economy and Environment, Housing and Strong and Healthy Communities. More specifically, it relates to the underpinning objectives of: developing community-led solutions to deliver services and manage assets; ensuring community volunteers are skilled and able; managing corporate assets more effectively; and outcome-based commissioning.

## **10. Background Information**

### Public Realm Services

- 10.1 Public Realm services include: street cleansing focused on town and village centres; litter picking on the verges of the main highways; maintenance of parks, open spaces, countryside sites and amenity areas owned by the Council; maintenance and administration of the Council's public car parks and public toilets; responsibility for trees and tree safety on council-owned land; and maintenance of play areas on council-owned land.
- 10.2 In Mid Suffolk these services are delivered by in-house public realm (includes both street cleansing and grounds maintenance) and countryside teams based at the Creting Road Depot in Stowmarket.
- 10.3 The gross budget for the service for 2018/19 is outlined at Figure 1 below. This illustrates the main gross budget figures for the Public Realm Service for 2018/19.

Heading	Mid Suffolk £
Community Development / Countryside	97K
Public Conveniences	19K
Street Cleansing (including HRA / other)	431K
Open Spaces (including HRA / other)	646K
Public Tree Programme	57K
Contributions / Donations	0
Footpaths	29K
Public Realm Review	0
<b>Total Gross costs</b>	<b>1.27M</b>

Figure 1: Public Realm Gross Budget for 2018/19

## 11. The Scope and Findings of the Public Realm Review

11.1 WYG were commissioned to carry out a review of public realm services across both Mid Suffolk and Babergh. The services in scope of the Public Realm Review included:

- Countryside;
- Arboriculture;
- Amenity areas, parks and open spaces;
- Street scene;
- A14 & A12 Highways verges work for the County Council;
- Playgrounds;
- Public conveniences; and
- Car parks (maintenance only).

### Summary - Findings of the Public Realm Review

11.2 Overall, the review concluded that standards of street cleansing are good, that both the in-house and outsourced services in Mid Suffolk and Babergh respectively represent value for money and that there is a high level of participation by volunteers in maintaining the public realm. The review identified opportunities for efficiencies, particularly through the integration of the two Mid Suffolk in-house services, namely Mid Suffolk Public Realm Team and the Countryside Team. It also highlighted areas requiring greater attention, including policy development, improved data collection, increased focus on arterial roads in and out of the main towns and health & safety when working on 'A' roads.

The findings are set out in more detail below.

### Specific Findings - Street Cleansing and Grounds Maintenance

- 11.3 Observation visits carried out by WYG in February 2017 highlighted that street cleansing and grounds maintenance standards were generally good. Observed standards were, however, found to be lower on the arterial roads into and out of main town centres.
- 11.4 The in-house service in Mid Suffolk was assessed as providing good value for money, based on:
- Cost;
  - Observed standards;
  - Benchmarking with other similar areas; and
  - Short term data on routine schedules and quantities.
- 11.5 WYG identified good practice within the service delivery approach, highlighting effective cross working between the MSDC in-house service and BDC Id Verde contractor, making use of the specialist skills in each service to mitigate the need for sub-contracting and additional external costs.
- 11.6 The service needs to improve operational data collection on service volumes and locations and to establish clear standards. This would further increase value for money assurance and support the building of a robust business case to assess options for the future delivery of public realm services.
- 11.7 Improvements should be made to better co-ordinate the activity between grounds maintenance and street cleansing teams to avoid litter shredding during grass cutting.
- 11.8 Health and safety practices should be reviewed for litter picking on verges along main roads, in accordance with national guidelines.
- 11.9 The public realm team carries out significant volumes of work on property owned by the Housing Service. It is recommended that the scope, standards, quantity and cost of work paid for through the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) is reviewed to make clear what the required standards are and to review the apportionment of charges between the HRA and General Fund.
- 11.10 The Council is advised to consider the impact of development of new sites on public realm provision and to review the approach to adoption of new sites and the impact that this may have on future service provision.
- 11.11 It was noted that the Service doesn't routinely monitor itself against performance measures or report to Members against defined performance indicators, and that this should be reviewed.

### Specific Findings – Countryside Team

- 11.12 The majority of the current countryside team expenditure is in Mid Suffolk.
- 11.13 The countryside team maintains a range of countryside sites within Mid Suffolk including Needham Lake, Eye Castle, The Pennings in Eye, Claydon Wood and Scole Picnic Site.

WYG identified that many of the countryside team's functions could be delivered by the in-house public realm team and recommended that these teams should be integrated to improve efficiency and coordination.

- 11.14 The consultants noted that the functions undertaken by the countryside team in Mid Suffolk are rarely given the same high level of dedicated service by other councils.

#### Specific Findings - Trees

- 11.15 The council has a Tree Safety Policy but no clear policy on the approach to tree replacement. A more holistic tree policy should therefore be developed.
- 11.16 A new tree policy will also embrace the Council's endorsement of the Woodland Trust Charter and the newly introduced 'Trees for Life' initiative, whereby in future a tree will be planted to mark the birth of every new baby born in Mid Suffolk.

#### Specific Findings - Public Toilets

- 11.17 It was recommended that an analysis of the current council-funded public toilets should be carried out to understand, in detail, individual facility costs, footfall, need, the potential for asset transfer and the options for alternative delivery such as community schemes.

#### Specific Findings – Partnership with Communities, Town and Parish Councils

- 11.18 WYG acknowledged the Council's ongoing achievements in partnership working on the Public Realm and assessed that there was a relatively high level of positive community and volunteer involvement. Examples of partnership initiatives in Mid Suffolk in the last 18 months include:
- 44 community litter picks, releasing council resources to tackle hotspots;
  - 100 volunteers litter picking in Stowmarket, Debenham & Barham;
  - 39 Community Caretakers in place in MSDC, decreasing response times for litter problems;
  - Partnership with Stowmarket Town Council to provide play sites;
  - Establishment of the Pikes Meadow Friends Group;
  - Community Volunteers at Eye Castle; and
  - Volunteer activity at Needham Lakes.

- 11.19 WYG made no further general recommendations in respect of community involvement.

#### Specific Findings – Future Delivery of the Service

- 11.20 WYG identified that both the Mid Suffolk in-house arrangements and the Babergh external contract represented value for money. However, they recommended that a full options appraisal should be carried out across the two councils during 2018/19, when there would be the additional assurance of more comprehensive

data sets than were available during the period of the review. A business case would then be provided to both Cabinets to enable Members to take a decision about the best delivery approach for public realm services in the longer term.

- 11.21 Mid Suffolk will therefore continue with its current arrangements in the medium term, at least until the Babergh contract with Id Verde runs out in November 2021. It will decide on the future delivery arrangements beyond 2021 with the benefit of a full business case.
- 11.22 In the meantime, detailed work on volumes and standards will be carried out to support the development of the required comprehensive business case.
- 11.23 WYG noted that if the selected option for either council was to tender externally, this would require a lead in time of more than a year.

## **12. Proposed Principles for Future Public Realm Service Provision**

- 12.1 A number of principles for the provision of Public Realm services have been developed and these have been informed by the findings of the Public Realm Review and feedback from the Public Realm Member Advisory Working Group. These are:
- A clean, green public realm environment, underpinned by a clear set of measurable standards;
  - A holistic approach to the public realm;
  - Efficiency and value for money in service delivery without compromising standards;
  - Co-ordination and, where relevant, integration between both internal (public realm team; countryside team) and external public realm (Suffolk County Council; Id Verde) and waste services (Serco) to maximise efficiency & effectiveness;
  - Increased partnerships with community volunteers, parish and town councils and businesses in the management and delivery of public realm services;
  - An environmentally friendly approach to the public realm in line with the emerging Environment Strategy and the Suffolk aspiration to be the greenest county;
  - A public realm that supports the promotion of the health and well-being of communities;
  - Effective, user friendly processes for residents to report public realm issues in line with the refreshed Public Access Strategy;
  - Future 'vehicles' to deliver public realm and broader waste services will be based on a comprehensive business case and sound evidence base;
  - Member and community engagement embedded in the development of public realm services; and
  - Aspirations and plans for the public realm will be integrated into the new Environment Strategy and the new Communities Strategy that will both be developed and agreed in 2018/19.

### **13. Key Actions**

- 13.1 To address the findings of the Public Realm Review a comprehensive action plan has been developed and the main actions are summarised below.

#### Actions already underway

- 13.2 These are the immediate actions taken to quickly make improvements to key areas identified in the Review.

- An action plan has been developed in response to findings of the review.
- A new set of principles has been developed to underpin future public realm provision.
- Street cleansing standards have been surveyed on arterial roads in and out of main towns and an improvement programme for hotspots has been put in place.
- A co-ordinated approach to street cleansing and grounds maintenance schedules has commenced internally and officers are also in ongoing discussions with Suffolk County Council Highways Service.
- Health and safety risk assessments and practices for work on 'A' roads have been updated and additional staff training has been delivered.

#### Actions – February 2018 to October 2018

- 13.3 These are more substantive improvements to fill policy gaps, define standards, measurements and reporting and to improve data collection needed to develop the business case for future service delivery.

- Agree performance measures for the Public Realm and set targets.
- Integrate the in-house public realm and countryside teams and explore the viability of establishing a rapid response service.
- Establish a Public Realm/HRA service level agreement to confirm the scope of work, quantities and standards and review HRA/General Fund finance apportionment.
- Develop public toilets policy.
- Review and extend trees policy.
- Identify a schedule of public realm assets across the districts that could be offered to town and parish councils to manage.
- Develop an open space/public realm asset adoption policy to support this.
- Put in place systems to improve data collection for both in-house and outsourced services.
- Identify and quantify further savings from efficiencies.

#### Actions - November 2018 to March 2019

- 13.4 These actions will develop and present the options for future service delivery once the detailed data requirements have been collected and analysed.

- Carry out soft market testing.
- Develop a business case for future delivery of public realm services for both Babergh and Mid Suffolk post November 2021.



- Further strategic development of the Public Realm will be integrated into the new Environment Strategy and new Communities Strategy (strategies adopted during this period but work ongoing from now).

#### **14. Member involvement in the Public Realm Element of the Environment Strategy**

14.1 To provide greater opportunities for Members to be involved in the transformation of the service, the following actions are proposed.

- Introduce Officer/Member 'Town Walks' to review our public realm assets, beginning in June 2018.
- Establish the following four cross-party Member Advisory Task and Finish Groups to:
  - (i) Develop standards and performance measures for public realm services;
  - (ii) Establish a policy for the adoption of open spaces and other public realm assets;
  - (iii) Review and extend the policy on trees; and
  - (iv) Develop a policy on public toilets.
- Ask scrutiny Committee to carry out pre-cabinet scrutiny on the business case for the future approach for delivering public realm services.

#### **15. Background Documents**

Public Realm Review by White Young Green (WYG) – December 2017

##### **Authorship:**

Kathy Nixon  
Strategic Director  
TEL: 01449-724964  
[kathy.nixon@baberghmidsuffolk.gov.uk](mailto:kathy.nixon@baberghmidsuffolk.gov.uk)

Jonathan Free  
Assistant Director - Communities and  
Public Realm  
TEL: 01449 724859  
[jonathan.free@baberghmidsuffolk.gov.uk](mailto:jonathan.free@baberghmidsuffolk.gov.uk)