

## Mid Suffolk District Councillors' Annual Report (2024/25)

### For Annual Parish Meeting

May 2025 (Page 1 of 2)

#### BUDGET FOR THE YEAR

For 2024/25, net expenditure on services was budgeted at £18.5 million with a 2% increase in council tax. Council home rents increased by 7% and sheltered housing service charges also increased. This was done to ensure the Council can afford the repairs and maintenance that are needed.

During the year approval was given to increase council tax on empty homes and implement increased council tax on second homes in order to support the best use of homes in the district.

The Council began the year with reserves of £28 million and during the year had a further boost to reserves by receipt of a £20 million dividend from the Gateway 14 business park. This fortunate position, together with government and other funding, enabled the council to support a number of schemes and projects for the District, some of which are described below.

- Funding was agreed to support availability of grants from £1k up to £15k to enable more households to carry out home adaptations for family members with a disability, long term illness or change in health.
- Funding to increase cost of living support for residents who already pay reduced council tax and to provide an extended Household Support Fund for difficulty with costs of items such as rent and service charges.
- Utilising the government Shared Prosperity Fund to launch a four element project to support people into, and in, employment. The four elements are; Employability Programme (help into employment and support once in it), Skills Academies Project (work taster sessions), Green Skills Project (development and capacity of green skills courses leading to qualifications) and Mental Health Project helping business to retain or recruit staff with mental health issues).
- Launching, for the second year, the Living Well in Winter Grant, to help local organisations deliver accessible spaces and activities during the colder months.
- Launching the Cosy Homes scheme with grants to add insulation to homes.
- Launching, for the second year, the Pride in Your Place grant, available to all communities in the District, to promote local identity, explore the area's heritage and history, and improve the appearance of the environment.
- Grants to communities to improve sports and play facilities and upgrade village halls.
- Introduction of the Mid Suffolk Tax Bus scheme connecting the surrounding villages and communities with Stowmarket.
- Support for the Stowmarket Town Rangers scheme to provide additional cleaning and improvement of the local environment.
- Creation of a Skills and Innovation Centre at Gateway 14, to bring businesses and training together in one centre with a focus on the green economy, and digital and AI technology.
- Establishing a £1.5 million fund for the enhancement of Stowmarket town centre.
- Funding feasibility work towards introduction of a residents parking zone scheme in Stowmarket.

#### NEXT YEAR'S BUDGET

The budget for 2025/26, agreed in February 2025, sets out a commitment to a capital programme of £36 million covering items including:-

- Further investment in sports and health facilities across the District.
- Further investment in the Skills and Innovation Centre at Gateway 14.
- £300k funding pot for projects in market towns and rural communities outside Stowmarket.
- Funding pot for acquisition of land for biodiversity/public access/flood resilience.
- Investment in cycling and walking infrastructure.
- An increase in Locality Grant award to £10,000 for each councillor.

### **COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE LEVY (CIL)**

CIL is a charged placed on developers and collected by the Council when new housing is built. Almost £550,000 was allocated by Mid Suffolk District Council Direct to communities across the district during the year to assist with infrastructure development.

### **PLANNING AND HOUSING**

Over the last year, Part 1 of Mid Suffolk and Babergh's Joint Local Plan (JLP), which was first created back in November 2023, had its first year of full operation. The purpose of the plan was to provide essential clarity for communities about how the district was to develop until 2037, delivering the government required number of 535 new dwellings annually.

However, in December 2024, the government revised the building targets, resulting in an increased annual requirement for Mid Suffolk of 734 dwellings per year. If we cannot demonstrate, via a five year land supply, that this target will be met there is a risk that National Planning Policy would take priority over our Joint Local Plan and the Council might find itself in the position of having to approve planning applications on sites contrary to the Local Plan. Consequently the Joint Local Plan is now under review and will continue to carry planning weight whilst the review takes place. In addition it is important that Parish Neighbourhood Plans are brought up to date with the new figures and Parishes currently without a Neighbourhood Plan are recommended to consider preparing one.

### **WASTE COLLECTION**

During the year the Council has developed plans in order to comply with the forthcoming new requirements (to be implemented in 2026) set out by National Government. Implementation is expected in 2026 and the new procedures will be publicised well in advance.

### **DEVOLUTION**

At the end of 2024 the government proposed widescale changes to local government across the UK. regarding devolution and council re-organisation:-

- Devolution – the formation of mayoral authorities
- Local government reorganisation – the combination of county and district councils into one unitary council.

Under Devolution the likelihood is that Suffolk and Norfolk will be combined as one mayoral authority with election of the Mayor in May 2026.

Under local government reorganisation the present position is that Suffolk County Council has proposed one single unitary council while the District and Borough Councils have submitted a proposal for two or three unitary authorities.

### **NEXT YEAR**

Whatever happens with local government re-organisation it will not take effect for around two years and therefore Mid Suffolk District Council looks forward to seeing you here again this time next year 😊.