

District Councillor's Report – Mar 2021

Covid 19

I have had the first dose of the Covid 19 vaccination. The process was easy, pain free and I suffered no side effects – I would encourage anybody offered the vaccination to take up that offer and thereby protect themselves and their community. However, as more and more of us are vaccinated this does not mean we can relax our efforts in supporting our residents and communities by following the rules - particularly with children having now returned to school. Do please continue to urge all to follow the guidelines to protect themselves, their loved ones and their communities, thereby keeping the roadmap for recovery on track.

Councils Pledges To Provide Further Financial Support For Struggling Households

Thousands of households across Mid Suffolk will be eligible for a reduction in their council tax bill after councillors approved further support for residents facing financial difficulties due to Covid-19. Last year, the Government announced a new Hardship Fund to help households already in receipt of means-tested working age Local Council Tax Support (LCTS). This enabled a reduction of up to £150 to be automatically applied to council tax bills for these households – ensuring the districts' most financially vulnerable residents had nothing to pay in 2020/21.

Councils were required to hold back enough Hardship Fund to make this same relief available to any new customers who claimed LCTS throughout the council tax year. However, as the year end approaches, there is still some funding remaining and so the councils have taken the decision to reduce council tax bills even more.

Mid Suffolk councillors unanimously approved an amendment to the existing Hardship Fund, to enable the maximum amount of funding to be allocated to working age council taxpayers most in need of support, at its Cabinet meeting today (Monday).

MSDC will now award further Hardship Relief to eligible residents who have received LCTS against their council tax liability for 2020/21. Households who are affected will automatically receive an adjusted bill – there is no requirement to apply.

Any Hardship Fund remaining, after applying the additional award, will be used to fund Discretionary Financial Assistance for residents in exceptional circumstances.

MSDC Budget 2021/ 2022

MSDC Councillors have agreed Mid Suffolk District Council's budget for 2021/22 – keeping council tax low while 'supercharging' the district's post-Covid recovery.

The following highlights were listed in the MSDC's General Account budget for 2021 / 2022:

- Council tax will rise by 1.66%, this equates to an annual increase for a Band D property of £2.80 per year.
- Pooled investments will generate £566,000 over the next year and the net return from CIFCO will be £1.5m; real investment coming into MSDC from outside the district.
- An additional £250,000 is to be made available as a Planning Legal Reserve to allow for the robust defence of planning appeals and £50,000 is earmarked to support Planning Enforcement actions.
- An additional £500,000 is to be added to the Climate Change & Biodiversity Budget which now totals £1m for 21/22.
- £4m of additional funding has been allocated to bolster Economy, Housing, Communities and Wellbeing. Councillors will attend workshops to examine how the money should be spent in order to ensure best effect. **If you have any ideas / suggestions as to how this funding should be spent, please forward them to me as soon as possible.**

Highlights within the Housing Revenue Account budget include:

- A surplus position is forecast for 2021/22 of £102k compared to the 2020/21 budget deficit position of £564,000.
- Council house rents will increase by 1.5%. Due to enforced decreases in rent in four of the previous five years, the average council house weekly rent in March 2022 will now be £84.49, that's only marginally higher – by just 11p - than it was in March 2016.
- Working with Iceni, the Council has identified development sites for 254 affordable homes and 119 shared ownership homes. New builds and acquisitions are forecast to cost £42.2million and our Housing Maintenance Programme £15.8million.
- The HRA Business Plan is currently being reviewed to understand how income over the medium and long term can be balanced against the requirements to invest in the existing housing stock including environmental 'retrofit' improvements and new safety enhancements in response to Building Safety and Fire safety. As well as building new homes that meet the draft Design Guide and new build specification. It is intended that a new Business Plan which articulates the vision for council housing will be presented to Cabinet and Council in the first six months of 2021

Museum of East Anglian Life Kickstart Scheme

MEAL is looking to recruit its first set of “Kickstarters” – 18-24-year-olds on six-month placements funded by the Department for Work & Pensions. It is a really exciting scheme and the museum is thrilled to be leading a wider consortium including two other Stowmarket-based organisations – the John Peel Centre and Modece Architects at Fox Yard - who are also recruiting now. Please publicise the vacancies as widely as possible.

The deadline for applications is noon on 26 March and applicants must be referred through the Job Centre. The following roles are available:

- [River Conservation Assistant](#) – carrying out work along the river, training in managing land for biodiversity
- [Collections Photography Assistant](#) – learning to use editing software, practical photography and documentation
- [Collections Conservation Assistant](#) – learning practical conservation skills
- [Media & Narratives Assistant](#) – research, producing digital content, audience research
- [Learning Assistant](#) – helping to deliver food-based learning sessions and events.
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The successful recruits will be starting at the museum on 12 April. There is an online Q&A session about placements on 17 March. Those interested need to register in advance. For more detail see the museum’s website:

<http://eastanglianlife.org.uk/kickstart/>

An Extra £3m For Warmer, Greener Suffolk Homes

More Suffolk residents, including those in Mid Suffolk, are set to benefit from Government Green Homes Grants thanks to a further successful bid for £3m funding by a Suffolk consortium of local authorities; this funding adds to a previous award of £1m secured last year.

The funding, provided by the Department of Business Energy and Industrial Strategy, will provide energy efficiency measures for owner occupiers of properties with poor energy performance ratings. Partner local authorities are already working on delivering five projects by March 2021, and have a completion deadline of September for the five new schemes. These are external wall insulation of 100 park homes in West Suffolk, 150 park homes in East Suffolk, and 70 Flagship Group properties, insulation and air source heat pumps on 100 homes in Babergh and Mid Suffolk, and internal wall insulation for 10 properties through Leiston Net Zero/EDF.

The Greener Homes scheme, which is designed to help make homes more energy efficient, is also available direct to homeowners, as well as to councils, offering

vouchers up to £5000 to households to get energy saving work done. The scheme is open until March 2022.

Plug In Suffolk

Plug in Suffolk is now providing grants for the installation of Electric Vehicle charging points at non-profit locations such as community centres, parish council car parks and village halls. Visit [Green Suffolk's website](#) or contact Suffolk County Council's environment strategy officer [Peter Frost](#) to find out more about the funding.

Regards

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