

District Councillor's Report – Mar 2022

Mid Suffolk District Council Freezes Council Tax

Mid Suffolk District Council has frozen its element of council tax this year – helping residents through post-pandemic recovery while still investing in priority areas to improve quality of life. The 2022/23 budget, which was approved unanimously by councillors, allows continued investment in the council's strategic priorities, including the economic regeneration of the district, and tackling climate change. It also builds on last year's additional investment of £5.1m into supporting the district's communities, at no extra cost to Mid Suffolk's council taxpayers.

Mid Suffolk District Council cabinet member for finance, Cllr John Whitehead, said:

“When I introduced my first budget, I hardly dared to dream that seven years later our council would be in such a strong financial situation: robust reserves, very healthy future projections, and the opportunity to now freeze our share of council tax, despite inflation.

“The idea then, that we would be in such a position and yet still be able to put aside more than £5m to fund an array of special projects as we emerged from a Covid pandemic would have seemed surreal – but we can, and we are.”

Babergh And Mid Suffolk District Councils Respond To New 'County Deal'

The leaders of Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils welcomed news that Suffolk is one of nine counties invited to negotiate a ground-breaking devolution deal – bringing more control over areas such as transport, infrastructure, and skills to the region. The Government's Levelling Up White Paper outlined a blueprint for driving up living standards and improving opportunity and prosperity across the country.

As part of it, Suffolk is one of nine county areas invited to negotiate a historic 'County Deal' - a new devolution model that, subject to negotiations, will give local leaders more powers to make decisions for their communities for the first time.

This could include greater control over buses and trains, to deliver London style public transport or skills programmes which focus on the needs of local people to help them access the high quality, high paying jobs of the future

Switch Onto A New Digital Skills Programme For Businesses

Business owners in Babergh and Mid Suffolk who want to learn new, or improve, their digital skills can now access free courses as part of a new business support programme. The Digital Skills Programme is part of Babergh and Mid Suffolk District

Councils post-covid recovery strategy and is being run by MENTA using funding from Suffolk Inclusive Growth Investment Fund (SIGIF).

The workshops, which are held virtually, are free to attend and cover topics such as online security, digital and social media marketing, e-commerce, and information management.

<https://store.menta.org.uk/collections/training?page=1>

A New Bigger, Better Library For Needham Market!

Suffolk Libraries and Mid Suffolk District Council are excited to announce that the new Needham Market Library is now open. Funded by Mid Suffolk District Council as part of the development of the former Middle School site, the new library building offers a bigger and more modern space for library events and activities, as well as bookable meeting rooms for the local community. Suffolk County Council also helped to fund the new library through section 106 housing developer contributions.

Located at the newly created Teachers Close, just off School Street, the library is part of a new development that includes 41 homes, made up of a combination of houses, flats and bungalows. The library features a new children's area, with a special sensory wall and more dedicated space for children's events and activities, such as Wordplay and story time sessions for young children.

Additional Funding To Support Districts' rough sleepers

Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Council have been awarded £324K to provide specialised emergency accommodation for rough sleepers and those at risk of homelessness. The funding, from the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government's Rough Sleepers Accommodation Programme, will see new energy efficient homes in Stowmarket and Sudbury, to provide emergency accommodation for vulnerable adults at risk of living on the streets.

Empty Homes Week (Feb 28-March 4)

Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils are reminding anyone struggling to renovate properties of the Empty Homes Renovation Loan. The loan is designed to help transform vacant properties which have been empty for more than six months and are in need of significant repairs.

Nine New Affordable Home In Botesdale For Local Residents

Nine affordable homes opened their doors to new households this month, following the completion of a new development in Botesdale. Mid Suffolk District Council has received the keys to nine affordable homes, part of 40 properties on the Abbots Way development by Burgess Home - made up of two and three-bedroom homes and one bed apartments, the development offers a mix of affordable, freehold shared equity and market sale homes.

The nine affordable rent properties will see one three-bedroom house, three two-bedroom houses and one 2-bedroom bungalows and four one-bedroom flats, allocated to lower income households who have a local connection to the district.

The properties also support the councils' commitment to combating climate change, with air source heat pumps installed as the primary heating source in the two and three bed houses and electric heating system in the apartments, making them more energy efficient and reducing carbon emissions.

The affordable rent homes were secured through a S106 agreement between the developer and the council. They are just part of Mid Suffolk's current investment in social and affordable rent housing across the district, with an additional 68 new build social and affordable rent homes in the pipeline for this year. These include

- Former Middle School, Needham Market - 13 affordable rent, 20 shared ownership and 8 social rent homes
- Eves Meadows, Haughley - 17 affordable rent and 5 shared ownership homes
- Green Road, Woolpit - 5 affordable rent homes

School's Out Activities To Support Families Through Half-Term

Football, swimming, crafts and outdoor cooking, were amongst the fun activities on offer from Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils and partners during the February half-term school holidays

The councils are working with a range of partners to deliver the varied programme of activities to help families through the holidays; supporting their commitment to supporting residents' health and wellbeing, focusing on those most in need.

<https://www.midsuffolk.gov.uk/communities/whats-on/activities-for-all/>

New Government Rebate

On 3 February, the Government announced measures to help protect millions of households from rising energy costs - including a '£150 council tax energy rebate.

The Government will provide funding for councils to give all households in England whose primary residence is valued in council tax bands A to D a one-off 'council tax energy rebate' payment of £150. This payment will operate outside of the council tax system (it will be a payment rather than a reduction in your council tax bill), using council tax lists to identify eligible households.

The Government has also announced that it will provide funding for councils to operate a discretionary fund for households in need who would not otherwise be eligible. This could include for example individuals on low incomes who live in properties valued in bands E to H. Again, we are awaiting details of how this scheme will operate.

Constituencies Are Changing - Have Your Say Now

The Boundary Commission for England (BCE) is required by Parliament to undertake an independent and impartial review of all constituencies in England, to rebalance the number of electors in each constituency. The 2023 Boundary Review also requires that the number of constituencies in England increases from 533 to 543.

The Commission is holding a secondary consultation on its initial proposals for new constituencies, which takes place from 22 February to 4 April 2022. During the consultation, public hearings will be held across the country to allow members of the public to provide their views in person. To have your say, submit your views in writing via [the consultation website](#), by email, or letter' or speak at a public hearing in your region.

Regards

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