

District Councillor's Report – Mar 2023

Council Tax Freeze Plus £2m For Energy Saving Measures

Mid Suffolk District Council has confirmed a council tax freeze for residents and ring-fenced £2m for household energy-saving measures for those most in need, despite rising costs and increased demands on services. While other councils have been forced to put up bills in order to balance their books, Mid Suffolk agreed unanimously to freeze its share of council tax – absorbing rising costs, rather than passing them on to residents. The freeze would mean the annual Mid Suffolk proportion of the council tax bill for a Band D property remaining at £171.59.

Mid Suffolk District Council also previously agreed a reduction of up to 100% for residents with the lowest incomes and a simplification of the existing Council Tax Reduction Scheme for residents on Universal Credit. Figures show the council's net cost of delivering services are set to increase by 41% from £8.77m in 2022/23 to £12.41m in 2023/34 as a result of global events, such as the Covid-19 pandemic and Putin's illegal war in Ukraine, plus rising inflation and interest rates.

There is a similar picture with the council's Housing Revenue Account, with a 40% increase to the cost of services. This saw councillors agree a 7% increase in rents for council housing to try to keep pace and to ensure the necessary investment in repairs and maintenance across the council's social housing stock. This means average weekly social rent increasing by £6.16 a week from £87.99 to £94.15. For affordable housing, weekly rents would increase by £9.03 from £126.96 to £137.99. The changes to council tax and rents will take effect from April 1.

New £12m Depot Would 'Future-Proof' Services For Residents

Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils are exploring plans to consolidate three aging operational sites into a shared £12m depot – future-proofing services for residents and improving conditions for their staff. The next stage of the project will involve developing a more detailed business case. It will also include identifying a suitable location for the councils' 200 shared operational staff and fleet – including waste services, public realm, and building services and repairs teams.

The councils' current main depots, in Stowmarket and Sudbury, are each over 50 years old and not fit for future needs, with significant and increasing costs now required to keep them running. A further depot at Great Wenham is also starting to struggle to meet 21st century operational demands. The sites are no longer able to house the staff and vehicles required to provide services in an efficient and cost-effective manner.

As well as providing council staff with a modern, fit-for-purpose depot to help them meet the needs of the growing population more effectively and efficiently, the new depot would also help 'future-proof' the councils' ambitions for further change ahead.

Babergh and Mid Suffolk's fleet was amongst the first in the country to begin running on Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil (HVO) in a move to slash carbon emissions. But further changes are in the pipeline with the implementation of the Government's Resource and Waste Strategy, and the global transition towards fully electric vehicles, which the existing sites would struggle to accommodate.

Significant capital investment is required to secure a new depot – with an estimated £12m required to develop a 3.25 hectare (8 acre) site within the districts. This would more than double the councils' current combined operational capacity – with Babergh District Council and Mid Suffolk District Council funding £6m each. These costs would be offset by the operational savings and income generation that could be delivered from sharing a single depot, estimated to be between £75k to £150k coming back into councils' coffers each year.

New Service Aims To Turn More Than 1,000 Empty Houses Into Homes

With over a thousand homes across Babergh and Mid Suffolk districts currently classified as empty, 'Houses4Homes' encourages owners of vacant residential properties to come forward for advice and support in turning their property into a home for another family. Empty homes can cause problems in the neighbourhood around them, often fall into disrepair and attract anti-social behaviour.

Now, in National Empty Homes Week, Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils introduce their Houses4Homes service, providing help and support for owners of properties that have been empty for six months or more. Houses4Homes supports the councils' aim to reduce the number of long-term empty properties within the districts, by helping to bring them back into use and discourage owners from leaving them empty. The service offers:

- construction advice: general housing advice from environmental health professionals, and construction and project planning support
- financial assistance: a £20K interest-free loan for property owners
- private letting support: working with Central Suffolk Lettings to support landlords offering lettings and income assistance

Residents are also encouraged to report any long-term empty homes they notice in their communities and across the districts online at www.houses4homes.org or by calling 0300 1234000.

Target To End Rough Sleeping In Suffolk

Suffolk's public sector leaders, including those from Babergh and Mid Suffolk, are targeting an end to rough sleeping across the county by 2027. During the Covid pandemic, anyone sleeping on the streets was rapidly housed under the 'Everyone In' initiative. During this, 160 people were accommodated in Suffolk in six weeks, including 42 in one day. There is a desire to build on that work and the lessons

learned, providing a long-term, sustainable solution to the problem in the county and help more people through a preventative approach.

The Suffolk Public Sector Leaders group discussed the issue at its meeting on Friday, February 17th. It decided to approve £75,000 funding for the Suffolk Housing Board to further develop proposals to prevent rough sleeping and support people who do fall into crisis on the streets, and the investment of £100,000 into developing plans to support young people leaving local authority care, who are at greater risk of homelessness. There were more than 500 care leavers in Suffolk last year, and there are hopes that independence training will help youngsters with this transition, increase opportunities and prevent eviction from tenancies.

Gateway 14 Officially Opens Main Estate Road

Mid Suffolk District Councillors joined representatives from Jaynic, town and parish councillors and partners involved in the Gateway 14 development for a ribbon cutting ceremony to officially open the first road on the site built by the infrastructure contractor Jackson Civil Engineering Ltd. The road, named Gateway Boulevard, marks the completion of the main estate road into the new state-of-the-art business, innovation and logistics park from the roundabout on the A1120 adjacent to Junction 50 of the A14 in Stowmarket, Suffolk.

The event follows hard on the heels of the ground-breaking ceremony held last Thursday (26th January 2023) to mark the start of construction of the 1.17m sq ft distribution hub for garden and leisure products retailer The Range that is set to create around 1,650 jobs for the district. Gateway 14 Ltd (wholly owned by Mid Suffolk District Council) and development partner, Jaynic, will provide a new base for manufacturing, logistics and R&D businesses with a particular focus on innovation and sustainability at Gateway 14 as well as providing innovation space for smaller and start-up businesses that will boost the local economy and attract investment into the region.

Supporting The Elections This May

The local and parish elections are due to be held on Thursday 4 May 2023. A copy of the election timetable is at Annex A for your information. MSDC is supporting the Electoral Commission's 'Got 5?' campaign running through March and April to raise awareness of upcoming elections and drive voter registration. The Commission will be advertising across a combination of channels including TV, radio, posters, social media, website banners, cinema advertising, and Google search. MSDC will also be sharing the messages through the council's social media channels and invite towns and parishes to do the same.

The UK Government has introduced a requirement for voters to show photo ID when voting at a polling station, which will be implemented in the upcoming local and Parish elections in May. MSDC continues to support the Electoral Commission's

national awareness campaign through all available council channels and ask that PCs also help where possible. Electoral Commission resources, including posters and social media, are available here: <https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/i-am-a/partner-charity-or-local-council/voter-id-resources>

Regards

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Election Timetable

Description	Date	Time
Publication of notice of election (district councils only)	Thursday 23 March 2023	
Deadline for delivery of nomination papers (all elections)	Tuesday 4 April 2023	4pm
Deadline for withdrawal of nominations (all elections)	Tuesday 4 April 2023	4pm
Deadline for appointment of election agents (all elections)	Tuesday 4 April 2023	4pm
Publication of statement of persons nominated (all elections)	Wednesday 5 April 2023	4pm
Deadline for receiving applications for registration	Monday 17 April 2023	
Deadline for receiving new postal vote and postal proxy applications, and for changes to existing postal or proxy votes	Tuesday 18 April 2023	5pm
Publication of notice of poll (all elections)	Tuesday 25 April 2023	

Description	Date	Time
Deadline for receiving new applications to vote by proxy (not postal proxy or emergency proxy)	Tuesday 25 April 2023	5pm
Deadline for receiving new applications for Voter Authority Certificates	Tuesday 25 April 2023	5pm
Deadline for notification of appointment of polling and counting agents	Wednesday 26 April 2023	
First date that electors can apply for a replacement for lost postal votes	Thursday 27 April 2023	
Day of poll	Thursday 4 May 2023	7am - 10pm
Deadline for emergency proxy applications	Thursday 4 May 2023	5pm
Last time that electors can apply for a replacement for spoilt or lost postal votes	Thursday 4 May 2023	5pm
Verification	Thursday 4 May 2023	
Count	Friday 5 May 2023	
Deadline for receipt of candidate election expenses (parish)	Thursday 1 June 2023	
Deadline for receipt of candidate election expenses (district)	Friday 9 June 2023	

Description	Date	Time