

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

- **New devolution and local government reform affecting Mid Suffolk**

The new Labour Government has proposed widescale changes across the UK regarding devolution and council re-organisation. This includes two proposals affecting Suffolk as a whole, including Mid Suffolk District Council, which may lead to its eventual abolition.

The first proposal is a strategic authority covering both Norfolk and Suffolk, which is likely to have a directly elected Mayor for both counties, and an increase in local powers for Suffolk. The election for this Mayor is currently scheduled to take place in May 2026.

The second is the re-organisation of the current two-tier system within Suffolk into either a single or multiple Unitary Authorities, where all of the council's general services are ran by one coherent entity. Should this proposal go ahead, it will likely result in the abolition of MSDC in the late 2020s. Suffolk has applied to be on the fast-track for this scheme, which has resulted in the postponement of the Suffolk CC elections that were due to take place in May 2025. The election date for new unitary authorities is currently unclear but is likely to be held after the mayor election, in May 2027.

Both the County Council and the combined District Councils have put in separate interim proposals to the government for consideration. MSDC is working hard to ensure that this reorganisation will not diminish nor disrupt local services.

- **Budget**

For 2024/25, net expenditure on services is 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 has been done to ensure the Council can afford the repairs and maintenance that are needed. All these increases are due to inflation, costs of energy and other cost increases.

The Council has reserves of over £28 million as at the end of the financial year plus an expected dividend from the Gateway 14 business park. Plans for this are on a variety of work including new foot/cycle paths, land for biodiversity and green spaces, regeneration of Stowmarket town centre, improved sports provision in the district and enabling community-led housing.

Approval was also given to increasing council tax on empty homes in 2024/25 and implementing increased council tax on second homes in 2025/26.

For the 2025/26 budget, recently agreed in the February council meeting, the administration committed to a capital programme of £36m for the district, which is partially funded by the council's reserves. This includes investment in health facilities, primarily including the ongoing SHELF project, investment into new skills and innovation within the district, and an increase in funding for the communities across Mid Suffolk's smaller towns and villages. In addition to these spending plans, there was also no planned increase in council tax, which was frozen at its current rate of £175.03 for a Band D property. Finally, the council is additionally estimated to have a surplus of £2.4m at the end of the financial year.

- **Thriving towns and villages**

As part of Mid Suffolk's Rural Transport Grant Scheme, two new community transport routes were launched, utilising the council's new Taxi Bus scheme, connecting Stowmarket with the surrounding villages and communities across Mid Suffolk. Initially, there were the two routes looping around villages of Mid Suffolk, beginning in Stowmarket, the first of these goes via Thurston, the second via Bacton, with further communities eventually being added, including Eye and Debenham. These have allowed for further connectivity between the villages across Mid Suffolk and Stowmarket in the heart of the District.

- **Environmental sustainability**

Mid Suffolk District Council previously launched their Cosy Homes scheme for Winter 2024, which included plans to improve insulation and energy efficiency within private homes across Mid Suffolk. This is a readily available scheme for residents and has made great progress in improving energy efficiency and sustainability across homes.

- **Planning and Housing**

In January 2025 the Joint Local Plan part 1, which was adopted in 2023, has now come under review as a result of new housing targets set out by national government. Whilst MSDC have previously exceeded with housebuilding targets, there is a possibility that the new national housebuilding guidelines take priority over the JLP if the council

cannot prove there is a 5-year land supply for housing. MSDC and Babergh are now working towards a new Local Plan which will incorporate the new housing numbers.

- **Supporting the community**

We support local events and community groups where we can and particularly link local groups with external fundraising via the Mid Suffolk community team. Almost £550,000 was allocated by Mid Suffolk District Council Direct to communities across the district from the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL).

I supported the following projects in Woolpit from my Locality Budget 2024-25:

- Beyond the Wall – iPads and Information boards
- Thornham Parish Hall - New Projection Screen
- East Anglian Storytelling Festival - At Thornham walks a storyteller will run a session targeted at families telling nature related stories. The audience decide which has been the best story and 'send' the teller to the East Anglian Storytelling Festival (to be held at The Food Museum 30th May/1st June 2025)
- Love the Dove – Water Testing Kit, Data from the water testing will be shared with the River Waveney Trust, who are supporting the group with technical advice.
- Mellis Memorial Hall - installation of a repair/upgrade to the Fire Alarm system.
- Mellis New VAS device and fixings.
- Gislingham Flower Festival – a spectacle of flower arrangements.
- Friends of Thornham Walks - essential equipment and hand tools for Thornham Walks volunteers to carry out their tasks.
- Wickham Skeith Village Hall -Replacement fridge

Mid Suffolk District Council information is available via www.midsuffolk.gov.uk or by phone **0300 123 4000**

I would like to thank the Parish Councils for all their work throughout the year.

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