

**Appendix C – County Cllr. Penny Otton’s Report to Full Council –**

- For information on local support during the Cost-of-Living Crisis, visit: <https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/coronavirus-covid-19/suffolk-advice-and-support-service/> Latest SCC COVID information is available here: <https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/coronavirus-covid-19/>
- For information on supporting Ukrainian refugees in Suffolk, email: [refugeesupport@suffolk.gov.uk](mailto:refugeesupport@suffolk.gov.uk)
- Homes for Ukraine: One Year Anniversary of War - the 24<sup>th</sup> February marked the one-year anniversary since Russia’s illegal and immoral invasion of Ukraine. Suffolk continues to do its part through the Homes for Ukraine programme – hosting refugees fleeing the war. In total, 1256 Ukrainian refugees have arrived in Suffolk through the programme. Currently, we have around 330 host families, supporting 750 Ukrainians – with others in private accommodation. Suffolk is in need of new hosts, to continue to offer a safe haven for Ukrainian refugees who are not yet ready to enter private accommodation. Based on numbers, Suffolk needs 50 new hosts in the coming months. If you think you can help, please visit [www.suffolk.gov.uk/Ukraine](http://www.suffolk.gov.uk/Ukraine). Hosts are entitled to £350 per month, which increases to £500 after 12 months. SCC Financial Budget - At the beginning of February, the Council’s budget for 2023/24 was voted in. The Conservative budget will now increase tax by 3.99% - broken down into a 2% rise in the Social Care Precept and a 1.99% increase in general tax. The Council is not on track to achieve Net Zero by 2030, Therefore, we proposed an additional 0.89% increase (19p weekly increase) to ensure vital services were protected from cutting support to residents, and that more direct action is taken to reduce carbon emissions.  
Our Group proposed to invest in a Carbon Budget Officer, to help develop a stronger pathway towards Net Zero. In addition, we proposed to facilitate a review into Suffolk’s speed limits, in the hope to provide residents with a clearer path to more appropriate travel in their communities. We proposed using £1m to actively recruit, retain and reward frontline staff in adult social care, as well as providing more for Suffolk Libraries . In addition, we wanted to invest £1m in providing wider capacity of community transport to be used to help achieve Net Zero through EV vehicle usage. I’m afraid these were voted down by the administration group
- Highways - with the parish council we are considering a way to prevent parking in front of the new re-cycling centre.
- SCC Cabinet Meeting - the Cabinet agreed to move the West Suffolk Archives in Bury St Edmunds to a new location in the town on Western Way. I know the current location has many problems including accessibility. Finally, the Cabinet discussed the Fire & Rescue Service’s new risk management plan. The plan outlines all foreseeable risks in Suffolk and indicates the service’s priorities and proposals to improve the service. Currently, the service suffers from low recruitment, poor retainment of officers, unmet response targets, and an increase in demand through extreme heatwaves caused by climate change. Our Group support the plan, hoping more investment can now be provided to the essential and increasingly ever-needed service.
- New Highways Services: Contract Agreed - Milestone Infrastructure, part of M Group Services, has been awarded SCC’s new highways services contract. The contract, worth between £800m-£1bn, will begin 1st October 2023 and will last up to 20 years. The service will provide maintenance of roads, pavement, Rights of Way, drainage, hedges, construction of new roads, and snow clearing – this is not an exhaustive list. Our Group campaigned last year for Suffolk Highways maintenance to be brought back in-house. We have been given reassurance from Suffolk Highways that the same mistakes will not repeat, and that the contract is more robust to deal with the inflated quotes previously received. However, our Group will closely monitor to ensure this is the case.
- Household Support Fund - Extension Granted by Government - The Government has agreed to extend the Household Support Fund, meaning local authorities will continue to receive funding to help residents through the current cost-of-living crisis. The grant is distributed through small payments to support vulnerable household meet daily needs such as food, clothing, and utilities.

- To apply for help, visit Suffolk’s Cost-of-Living support leaflet at: <https://suffolk.pagetiger.com/cost-of-living-support/scc1>

#### **Appendix D -**

#### **District Cllr. Harry Richardson’s Report to Full Council –**

- 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. An amendment by the Green and Liberal Democrat Group, saw councillors also agreeing to ring-fence £2m for energy-saving measures for homes across the district, helping to address the cost-of-living crisis for vulnerable households by reducing energy bills, and tackling the climate change emergency by slashing emissions. The freeze means 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 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 service aims to turn more than 1,000 empty houses into homes across districts - With currently over a thousand homes across Mid Suffolk 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. Houses4Homes supports the council’s 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: an £20K interest free loan for property owners
- Private letting support: working with Central Suffolk Lettings to support landlords offering lettings and income assistance.

Residents also are encouraged to report empty homes in their communities online at [www.houses4homes.org](http://www.houses4homes.org) or by calling 0300 1234000.

- First look at culture, heritage and visitor economy strategy for Babergh and Mid Suffolk - The first steps towards a dedicated cultural, heritage and visitor economy strategy could move forward should proposals be approved by Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils Cabinets in March. The strategy will outline a long-term vision to support the cultural, heritage and visitor economy sectors and identify objectives to support this important industry which is already worth over £250m per year to the Districts. The development of the strategy started in autumn 2022, with a series of engagement events and one-to-one consultations with representatives from a range of cultural, tourism and heritage businesses and wider industry partners. To support the development and

delivery of the Babergh and Mid Suffolk cultural, heritage and visitor economy strategy, a cross-party member working group has been established in conjunction with an internal officer working group and ongoing liaison with the cultural and tourism businesses and organisations. The results of this engagement, along with extensive desk research, have been used to create a strong foundation for the strategy from which the aims and objectives have been developed. The aims of the strategy are to support residents in Babergh and Mid Suffolk to live full cultural lives, building cultural confidence and civic pride; to create a sustainable, resilient Culture, Heritage and Visitor Economy Sector that champions the region's distinctive qualities; and to support the Culture, Heritage and Visitor sectors to work collaboratively with neighbouring organisations, districts and counties to trial new approaches.

### **District Cllr. Austin Davies' Report to Full Council –**

- MSDC Meeting - Mid Suffolk District Council financial officers explained that the 2022/23 predicted surplus would be reduced by approx. £1 million to £3 million For 2023/24 the proposed budget was amended to include our Green Party proposal to make £2 million worth of grants for energy saving measures available for our district householders. Our project to make 2 electric buses available schedule services for rural villages continues. The budget was passed unanimously. There will be a zero increase in our District Council Tax element. However, rents on our council houses will be increased by 7%. Councillors argued that since benefits were being increased by approximately 10% our tenants would be able to manage. This decision was not passed unanimously. It was decided to increase the budget of our Communities and Wellness section. So from April grants would be made available for local organisations and communities to develop, improve and expand their building and activities. These grants can also be used for appropriate feasibility studies.
- Thurston Community College/Beyton Sixth Form - Held meetings with appropriate representatives of both sites exploring opportunities for improved community access to the above facilities such as meeting rooms, dance studios, football pitches, Netball courts, fitness studios and performance areas.
- Planning - Thurston Parish Councils lost the case against MSDC/Bloor homes. Discussion now moves to reserved matters for the 210-house development off Beyton Road in Thurston. Planning officers are minded to refuse the Gladman Homes proposed development off Ixworth Road.
- Gateway 14 - The 'Range' has paid our MSDC subsidiary the initial £30 million.
- Environment - Our district now has a 'Climate Change Manager'. One of the roles for this officer is to develop a plan for Electric Vehicle charging points. Accompanied Suffolk Wildlife trust officer and the 33-acre project lead on a tour of the site. Continued to push for the Cycle Route 51 change between School Road and Church Road in Thurston.
- Locality Fund - Some of the equipment needed to set up a pickle ball club was the last 2022/23 grant.