

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

2020-21 Budget Proposals

Overview:

- Forecast Budget Requirement = £545.4m
- Expected Funding = £550.8m
- The remaining funding will be divided into contributions to reserves (£1.8m), investment into Highways (£0.5m) and the “Suffolk 2020 Fund” (£3m)

Council Tax: Council Tax is due to increase by 4% in 2020-21 .1.9% of this will be for general council tax, whilst another 2% will be the final increase for the Social Care Precept.

Suffolk 2020 Fund: £3m of the Council’s funding was suddenly announced at the end of 2019. This will be available through the “Suffolk 2020 Fund”. The purpose of this fund is to enable investment in projects focused on carbon reduction/offset, road safety, natural environment, built environment, innovation and use of technology. The budget proposals suggest that all projects will need to have a Cabinet “sponsor” and be capable of delivery within 12 months. They must have a clear return on investment (economic, social and/or environmental) and involve non-recurring expenditure. More details on how this funding will be allocated, and who can bid for funding, is not yet known.

Citizens Advice: In last year’s budget, Suffolk County Council announced that it would be removing the £368,000 grant for Citizens Advice. However, the budget proposals for 2020-21 include £120,000 funding for Citizens Advice. This grant will remain in place for three years only and will be subject to annual review of the service in terms of efficiency, income generation and impact. After three years of additional funding, the council expects Citizens Advice to become financially independent. I have asked why the grant could not be increased.

Savings: There are no major cuts to services proposed in the 2020-21 budget. However, the budget does rely on the council achieving £7.2m of savings and a further £12.3m.

Future Bus Projects: At a Scrutiny meeting in December, the deputy cabinet member for transport announced that the council was planning to bid for around £20 million from the Department for Transport for an electric bus pilot scheme. If the bid is successful, the council has said that it plans to launch the pilot scheme within 12-18 months in the Bury St Edmunds area.

First new SEND units announced: In January 2019, Suffolk County Council agreed to provide an additional £45.1m to fund additional school and specialist units for children with SEND. The first 10 specialist units, providing 168 spaces, are due to open in September 2020. The new units will be including Ixworth School (communication and interaction needs - KS3/4)

Highways Issues: I have tried to get some resolution of the problems on Meadow Lane and construction traffic parking on the main highway.

Flooding on Beyton Road: I have contacted Highways England as part of the problem was the poor clearing of the gully at the slip road. Also the county solicitor has been trying to get the landowner to accept responsibility for the ditches along the road.

New Re-cycling Centre: I’ve now been told this will open on 16th January and the Rougham Hill will close on 14th January.

Appendix D –

District Cllr. Harry Richardson's Report to Full Council

In the absence of any full Council meeting between this report and my previous one, I have provided an update on some wider matters that may be of interest to you.

National Planning Policy - Following last month's general election there are a number of policy changes identified in the Conservative Party's manifesto that have the potential to change the way that MSDC considers planning applications and I thought it prescient to bring these to your attention:

“Infrastructure first: We will amend planning rules so that the infrastructure – roads, schools, GP surgeries – comes before people move into new homes. And our new £10 billion Single Housing Infrastructure Fund will help deliver it faster.

Beautiful, high-quality homes: We will ask every community to decide on its own design standards for new development, allowing residents a greater say on the style and design of development in their area, with local councils encouraged to build more beautiful architecture.

Environmentally friendly homes: We will support the creation of new kinds of homes that have low energy bills and which support our environmental targets and will expect all new streets to be lined with trees.”¹

I would urge a strong degree of caution in treating these as firm commitments, however. As far as I am aware there have not been any White Papers or policy papers produced in support of them. As a result, these initiatives may be subject to change, delay etc. but they would have a significant – and, in my view, positive – impact on local planning rules if implemented in full.

MSDC Budget 2020/21 - The first draft of Mid Suffolk District Council's budget for 2020/21 is set to be considered by councillors later this month, including a 1.66% increase in its share of council tax, adding £2.76 a year to the bill of a Band D Property.²

The budget will be considered by Mid Suffolk cabinet members on Monday 13th January and by Overview and Scrutiny on Thursday 16th January. It will then go to Full Council in February and, if approved, will come into effect on 1st April.

This will include:

- A proposed increase of 1.66% to council tax, equivalent to just £2.76 over the course of a year for a Band D property (increases range from £1.84 per annum for the smallest Band A property to £5.54 for the largest Band H property).
- No change in the Council Tax Reduction Scheme that sees poorest residents pay just 5% of their bill.
- A change to empty property discount, reducing the period that unoccupied and unfurnished properties pay discounted council tax from three months to 28 days, in order to bring empty properties in the district back into use.
- Continued investment in CIFCO – the council's property investment company, as agreed in last year's budget. CIFCO currently contributes over £1.4m a year in income to Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils and makes a significant contribution to the money required to run the councils' services. Without this income, residents would face the choice of either a substantial hike in council tax bills to fund the shortfall or cuts to services.
- A reserve of £500,000 set aside for 2020/21 to tackle climate change.

The increases are in the face of reduced Government finance and changing funding landscape, with local councils increasingly incentivised to deliver local economic and housing growth – making both essential to the financial future of the council.

¹ The Conservative Party Manifesto', p. 31 (2019). [Source: https://assets-global.website-files.com/5da42e2cae7ebd3f8bde353c/5dda924905da587992a064ba_Conservative%202019%20Manifesto.pdf]

² This is significantly below both the growth in average earnings (3.6%) and inflation (1.8%) in the year to September 2019 [Source: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-50388220>]

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The budget report also recognises the cumulative savings/income of £30.9m achieved by the Council since 2011/12, through shared services, efficiencies, better use of technology and commercial opportunities – with a further £2.7m in savings/income identified for 2020/21 and beyond.

Councillors are also considering the introduction of penalties to tackle council tax fraud, alongside the adoption of a new protocol produced by Citizens Advice and Local Government Association for the collection of council tax arrears, in order to help those in genuine need.

In the meantime, residents can easily check their details and let the councils know of any changes 24/7 by signing up for an online account via the councils' website. Through an online account, residents can opt for paperless billing, check their balance, see instalments, update their details and see council tax reduction and housing benefit claim information as well as viewing bills online.

Across the District more broadly there have been a number of new announcements in recent weeks and I have included summary of these updates below:

Next phase in development of Needham Lake Visitor Centre and Café - plans for a £600,000 visitor centre/cafe at Needham Lake have been approved and a local operator selected to run it – supporting local youth work and boosting tourism to the town.

1000 Endangered Animals - over Christmas the Suffolk Waste Partnership's celebration of recycling took on a theme of endangered animals. The artwork created by schools across Suffolk will be on display at Ipswich Town Hall café Gallery until 11 Jan, and The Apex , Bury St Edmunds until March 2020.

791k funding boost for communities - communities across Babergh and Mid Suffolk received a funding boost totalling £791,000, for local projects including a new car park and bus shelter.

New recycling wrap-up - the festive and New Year period are always a great time to encourage residents to think about reducing waste and improving their recycling knowledge and this year Suffolk Recycling launched a new Christmas Wrap-Up.

The guide has tips on how to reduce waste and improve recycling habits over Christmas, all in one place – including information on what to do with old fairy lights, wrapping paper, baubles, trees, food, metals and more. You can find the full guide on MSDC's website.

Suffolk's Recycling Centres also offer free 'Reduce, Reuse and Recycle - not a Waste of time!' sessions to interested parties to learn more about ways to reduce waste and recycling. This will help to provide an alternative way to access information about recycling which is also available on the Suffolk Recycling website.

Report from District Cllr. Sarah Mansel (standing in for Cllr Wendy Turner) to Full Council

Locality grants - the deadline for applications for locality grand funding is now the end of January. Councillors need to process the applications in February.

Needham Lake Visitor Centre - plans for a £600,000 visitor centre/cafe at Needham Lake have been approved. Planning permission was granted on 11th December and 127 Trading company are the preferred tenants. Works should begin in spring 2020, and this will be a welcome addition to East Anglia's most visited free attraction.

Council Tax Fraud - MSDC Cabinet are to discuss a new initiative to issue new fines for Council Tax fraud on 6th January. Alongside the penalties, councillors are also due to consider adoption of a new protocol produced by Citizens Advice and Local Government Association for the collection of council tax arrears.

CIL expenditure - On 6th January MSDC Cabinet are to determine an application for CIL Funding for a new Sixth Form Centre at Stowupland High School outside of the normal bid cycle. An original bid for approx £1.2M was

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submitted during bid round 1, but this fell far short of the actual costs and at that time there was no planning permission. Following the grant of planning permission in October the bid was validated and has now been revised to approx £2.5M.

Other bids which were received in Bid round 4 (October 2019) will be considered at the March Cabinet Meeting.

Budget 2020/21 - Members received a briefing on the draft budget for 2020/21. This draft budget will be considered by Cabinet on 13th January and Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 16th January; it is expected to be approved at full Council meeting on 27th February.

New Homes Bonus - for 2020/21 will be £1.612M, an increase of £232k over 2019/20 but is likely to reduce (possibly by 50%) in 2021/22. Baseline business rates will increase by 2%. Government propose a full business rates revaluation in 2021; a fundamental review of business rates is also likely. The net revenue budget is proposed to be £10M and the Capital Programme £12M, the latter includes a proposed further investment of £8.7M in commercial properties. It is proposed that there will be a Council Tax increase of 1.66%, this equates for a Band D property to £2.76 pa, 5p per week.

Housing Revenue Account - after four years of government-enforced reductions, the council is also proposing putting up council house rents by 2.7% - 1% above Consumer Prices Index. This will result in an average increase of £2.19 per week increase for tenants. Sheltered housing tenants also face an increase of £2 a week on their bills plus a 62p a week increase to their utility bills.

Neighbourhood Plans - two more neighbourhood plans – Eye and Fressingfield, are due to be adopted at the Cabinet meeting on 13th January.