

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

For Annual Parish Meetings

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BUDGET FOR THE YEAR

For 2024/25, net expenditure on services was 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 was done to ensure the Council can afford the repairs and maintenance that are needed.

During the year approval was given to increase council tax on empty homes and implement increased council tax on second homes in order to support the best use of homes in the district.

The Council began the year with reserves of £28 million and during the year had a further boost to reserves by receipt of a £20 million dividend from the Gateway 14 business park. This fortunate position, together with government and other funding, enabled the council to support a number of schemes and projects for the District, some of which are described below.

- Funding was agreed to support availability of grants to enable more households to carry out home adaptations for family members with a disability, long term illness or change in health.
- Funding to increase cost of living support for low income residents when paying council tax and to provide an extended Household Support Fund for difficulty with costs of items such as rent and service charges.
- Utilising the government Shared Prosperity Fund to launch a four element project to support people into, and in, employment. The four elements are; Employability Programme (help into employment and support once in it), Skills Academies Project (work taster sessions), Green Skills Project (development and capacity of green skills courses leading to qualifications) and Mental Health Project helping business to retain or recruit staff with mental health issues).
- The Living Well in Winter Grant continued to help local organisations deliver accessible spaces and activities during the colder months.
- The Cosy Homes scheme with grants to add insulation to your home.
- Continuing the successful Pride in Your Place grant, available to all communities in the District, to promote local identity, explore the area's heritage and history, and improve the appearance of the environment.
- Community grants to improve clubs, village halls, play facilities continues as does our Locality grants.
- In November the launch of the Mid Suffolk Tax Bus scheme connecting the surrounding villages and communities with Stowmarket began as did Rural Connect.
- The new REACT initiative created by our Public Realm team to provide additional cleaning and improvement of the local environment was launched.
- Creation of a Skills and Innovation Centre at Gateway 14, to bring businesses and training together in one centre with a focus on the green economy, and digital and AI technology.
- More closer to home, my locality grant was spent on 7 awards this last yr and ranged from establishing a community use minibus in partnership with the High School, Debenham Day, Hoppit Wood improvements, Community Music events such as the Faure's Requiem along with Water Testing and helping our Local Scouts and Orchestras Live in conjunction with other local councillors to maximise the benefit of our funding.

NEXT YEAR'S BUDGET

The budget for 2025/26, agreed in February 2025, sets out a commitment to a capital programme of £36 million covering items including:-

- Further investment in sports and wellbeing facilities across the District.
- The actual building of the Skills and Innovation Centre at Gateway 14.
- £300k funding pot for projects in market towns and rural communities outside Stowmarket.
- Funding pots for acquisition of land for biodiversity/public access/flood resilience.
- Investment in cycling and walking infrastructure.
- An increase in Locality Grant award to £10,000 for each councillor for your area.
- Ongoing support for a range of other grant schemes to support community & business.

COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE LEVY (CIL)

CIL is a charge placed on developers and collected by the Council when new housing is built.

Almost £550,000 was allocated by Mid Suffolk District Council Direct to communities across the district during the year to assist with infrastructure development. We have around £8million pounds that has been given direct to Town and Parish Councils under the term Neighbourhood CIL. We are eager to help those Town and Parish Councils with any ideas they may have for investing in their infrastructure.

PLANNING AND HOUSING

Over the last year, Part 1 of Mid Suffolk and Babergh's Joint Local Plan (JLP), which was first created back in November 2023, had its first year of full operation. The purpose of the plan was to provide essential clarity for communities about how the district was to develop until 2037, delivering the government required number of 535 new dwellings annually.

However, in December 2024, the government revised the building targets, resulting in an increased annual requirement for Mid Suffolk of 734 dwellings per year. Consequently the Joint Local Plan is now under review and will continue to carry planning weight whilst the review takes place. In addition it is important that Parish Neighbourhood Plans are brought up to date with the new figures and Parishes currently without a Neighbourhood Plan are recommended to consider preparing one.

Our Local Listed Building Consent Order LLBCO should be moving forward and the LDO is moving forward but at a slower pace.

WASTE COLLECTION

During the year the Council has developed plans in order to comply with the forthcoming new requirements (to be implemented in 2026) set out by National Government. Implementation is expected in 2026 and the new procedures will be publicised well in advance. This will be WEEKLY food collection and TWO bins being collected every week.

DEVOLUTION

At the end of 2024 the government proposed widescale changes to local government across the UK. regarding devolution and council re-organisation:-

- Devolution – the formation of mayoral authorities
- Local government reorganisation – the combination of county, borough and district councils into one unitary council.

Under Devolution, Suffolk and Norfolk will be combined as one mayoral authority with election of the Mayor happening in May 2026.

Under local government reorganisation, a resident of Suffolk or Norfolk will now have only one council, how big that council(s) is/are and how it will work in practice is still being looked at and this will take at least a couple of years to happen.

AWARD

In February the Council's Building Control Team was awarded Local Authority Building Control Team of the Year by LABC (Local Authority Building Control).

NEXT YEAR

Whatever happens with local government re-organisation it will not take effect for around two years and therefore Mid Suffolk District Council looks forward to seeing you here again this time next year 😊.