

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

### **Earl Stonham May 2025**

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

Following on from the election of the new Labour government in July 2024, the new 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 run 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 for any new authorities is currently unclear, but is likely to be held after the Mayor election, in May 2027.

Talks for both are currently an ongoing matter, although new information will likely be updated frequently throughout the year.

- **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**

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, and assisted in allowing for a structured response to housing and planning targets, of which Mid Suffolk had always excelled at, and delivered Mid Suffolk's aim of 535 new houses annually. In January 2025, the plan has since 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.

- **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).

Mid Suffolk District Council information is available via [www.midsuffolk.gov.uk](http://www.midsuffolk.gov.uk) or by phone **0300 123 4000**

## Earl Stonham – Parish Report - May 2025

Devolution – Mayoral Combined Authority	At last month’s extraordinary council meeting, the response to the consultation for the council on the Norfolk and Suffolk devolved authority from Mid Suffolk Council was discussed. The response, which included some positive aspects and some negative comments, was unanimously approved.
Local Government Reorganisation	An early example of problems caused by the uncertainty is cancellation of a project to create a combined new depot for waste services, housing and other activities. The location and scope now need to align with the changed geography of the county which is yet to be settled. Meanwhile Mid Suffolk and Babergh have each committed £250,000 to refurbish existing depots such as at Creting Road, Stowmarket.
River Ratt Catchment – Flood alleviation & nature recovery	An initial ‘leaky dam’ has been agreed, and local landowners will be invited to join the ‘Upper Gipping Farm Cluster’ which was established last year, led by Green councillors, and supported by a part-time worker from Suffolk Wildlife Trust, funded by MSDC.
Land for wildlife and public access	Cabinet has agreed another purchase of land which is suitable for public access as well as nature enhancement. Location confidential at present.
New grant offers for Mid Suffolk sports facilities	Over £750,000 of the Community Sports Infrastructure Grant has been set aside for new sporting facilities across Mid Suffolk, including either building new or upgrading existing infrastructure. More information can be found in Mid Suffolk’s article: <a href="https://babergh.gov.uk/midsuffolk.gov.uk">New grant offers significant funding for sporting opportunities across Mid Suffolk - Mid Suffolk District Council -  babergh.gov.uk / midsuffolk.gov.uk</a>
£100k for new Mid Suffolk culture fund	A funding grant of over £100k has been approved to promote Mid Suffolk’s culture, including support for children in arts and theatre. This also includes support for both the Food Museum and the John Peel Centre in Stowmarket, which are closely linked with the council.
Locality budget 2025/26	The next round of locality funding is now live so I am able to accept applications for grants. The total amount per councillor has increased to £10,000. Full details available <a href="https://midsuffolk.gov.uk/w/locality-awards">https://midsuffolk.gov.uk/w/locality-awards</a>