

District Councillor Annual Report 2023

Councillor Andrew Stringer, Mendlesham Ward

Budget Proposals for 2023/4	<p>The district council's finances are split into two parts: The general fund, which is in very good shape, and the ring-fenced Housing Revenue Account (HRA) – which is not. The council debated the 2023/24 budgets for both parts on the 23rd Feb. We agreed a council tax freeze for residents. There was also a reduction of up to 100% for residents with the lowest income and a simplification of the existing Council Tax reduction scheme for residents on Universal Credit. There has been an overspend of £893k on last year's budget but we are still able to put around £3m into reserves.</p> <p>Despite the difficulties of the most vulnerable, there was a proposed increase in council house rents by 7% to meet the rising costs of the Housing Revenue Account. This is less than the rate of inflation.</p> <p>The Council also agreed to set aside £2000,000.00 from reserves to help residents with insulation for homes.</p>
Housing issues	<p>MSDC referred themselves to the Regulator of Social Housing because there were found to be some issues relating to health and safety compliance. The RSH reported their findings and will continue to monitor the Council's housing until the issues are resolved. An action plan has been agreed to ensure that our housing becomes compliant in a timely manner.</p>
Gateway 14	<p>Construction of Suffolk's largest shed - a state-of-the-art distribution unit for retailer The Range is officially underway at Gateway 14, after a ground-breaking ceremony at the end of January. Gateway 14 Ltd will provide a new base for manufacturing, logistics and R&D businesses with a particular focus on innovation and sustainability, as well as providing space for smaller and start-up businesses. There is a lot of interest as the site is part of Freeport East, as businesses located there do not pay Vat, National Insurance or Business Rates.</p>
Houses for Homes	<p>Babergh and Mid Suffolk are aiming to reduce the number of long-term empty properties, and bring them back into use. There are currently an estimated 600 empty homes across the two districts. Houses for homes is a re-branding of the service in the hope that people will engage better with the Councils to bring these homes into use. If you know of any empty properties please let me know and the team will investigate.</p>
SHELF project	<p>MSDC Cabinet approved the next phase of the business case for the Stowmarket wellbeing and leisure hub. Since the initial plans were drafted last year the project now intends to include a new sports pavilion, a multi-use games area, four indoor sports courts and a multi-agency wellbeing hub.</p>
Solar Carport scheme	<p>Mid Suffolk opened a solar carport, battery storage and EV charging facility, at the Mid Suffolk Leisure Centre, the project cost £760,000.00 and will help cut the energy bills for the centre, as well as provide much needed charging infrastructure.</p>

Electric Bus Scheme	Mid Suffolk agreed in the previous years budget to pilot a demand responsive electric bus scheme similar to the “katch” scheme in East Suffolk, the scheme has been put on hold by the administration.
Planning	<p>This year has seen the Joint Local Plan take another step forward, but we are still have a long way to go before a complete set of up to date policies are in place for Mid Suffolk.</p> <p>Mendlesham has been the first Parish Council in Mid Suffolk to successfully review a Neighbourhood Plan, With Thorndon completing their plan and Wetheringsett making progress with their plan, the future challenge will be to make sure planners do put these plans at the centre of all their decision making,</p>

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