

Mid Suffolk District Councillors' July 2020 Report to the parishes in the Claydon & Barham Ward

COVID-19 and Council Finances

From May onwards all councils have been required to submit to Central Government (MHCLG) on a fortnightly basis, in a prescribed form, an estimate of the financial impact of COVID. COVID impacts both income streams and expenditure. At this point in time, one quarter into the financial year, it involves a great deal of forward 'crystal ball gazing' to estimate falls in planning income, car park income and the many other council income streams. Some expenditure (eg on homelessness) has been part compensated already from central government. Other pressure on council finances will come from reduced business rate income, falls in council tax receivables as residents move onto Universal Credit and council house rent collection pressures.

Mid Suffolk DC has now closed its books for year-end 31st March 2020 and its financial outturn for the year, subject to audit, was presented to Cabinet in early July. A modest amount (£294k) was added to the Growth & Efficiency Fund driven by extra investment income, planning fee income and the CIL administration fees offset by lower CIFCO interest receivable due to delayed property investment and lower car park income. General Fund Reserves, excluding the ring-fenced CIL receipts, are over £18million which gives us a high level of confidence that Mid Suffolk DC can weather the COVID impact.

Climate Change – Carbon Reduction Management Plan

July's Cabinet meeting included a full afternoon session debating a Carbon Reduction Management Plan. Having acknowledged the climate change emergency in July 2019 and a desire for the council to be carbon neutral by 2030, a Babergh and Mid Suffolk cross-party Task & Finish Group was established to bring forward and examine various initiatives to feed into a Carbon Reduction Management Plan. Mid Suffolk allocated £500k in its 2020/21 budget to commence the finance of emerging initiatives. There is not space here to list the many initiatives but the report and detailed appendices are on the council's website and the full Cabinet debate can be viewed on Youtube.

CIFCO Property Investment

Full Council in July (23rd) is to review the performance of the CIFCO property investment business that is jointly owned by Babergh and Mid Suffolk and will be asked to approve the CIFCO Business plan for 2020/21. There have recently been several letters in the local press, strongly critical of the councils' CIFCO investments and also some discussion on local radio. Both councils' administrations remain convinced that their joint CIFCO investment in a diverse and well-located portfolio of freehold commercial properties will generate a reliable annual income stream for the councils as well as providing a longer-term real financial legacy asset as the borrowings are repaid. Any parish councillors, or residents, who have their own concerns are encouraged to discover more about CIFCO in the detailed report that is being brought to Full Council. Again, this debate can be watched live or viewed later on Youtube.

Policing Update for Claydon and Barham Ward July 2020

Recruitment

The government uplift in numbers is providing additional money for 54 police officers and associated costs this year. So far 18 have been recruited with several more now awaiting assessment in spite of the pandemic, which is good news. By the end of this financial year officer numbers should be around 1,240, the highest it has been for many years.

Covid Costs

The extra pandemic related costs are forecast to be around £900k. Some of this is due to PPE, changes to work stations and cleaning. Around £400k is down to lost income mainly from the inability to hold speed awareness courses and also some attendance at various events. Investment in IT has been brought forward and is not really an extra cost. I believe the Home Office is likely to compensate forces for most of this. The main concern is down to collection of Council Tax revenues and a shortfall that may accrue.

New Police and Fire Station in Stwomarket

Details of the plans are on the PCC website and comments would be welcome. The process finishes on July 21st. This is a brand-new facility and the County Council makes the planning decision. We hope to have it granted later this year. Very good news for the area and the local construction industry.

Funding of PCSOs

There is now more flexibility regarding working hours for PCSOs and the force welcomes discussion and applications from any single or combinations of parishes and business to fund dedicated PCSOs for your area. The contract would be for a minimum of two years and costs around £35k per year with an additional charge for a patrol car if required

County Lines

The number of active county lines in Suffolk has now declined to 20. Still a great deal to do but good progress is being made

Sentencing of Offenders

There have been some disturbingly weak sentences handed out recently for prolific offenders in particular. In each case I am writing formally to the attorney-general expressing concern and asking what the government will do to address this problem as a matter of urgency.

Protests and Black Lives Matter

Anyone has the right to protest peacefully and within the law. Those events held in Suffolk have generally respected social distancing and there has not been the trouble seen in other areas. I have asked the police to ensure vandalism, violence and anti-social behaviour will not be tolerated at such events.

John Whitehead and Tim Passmore