

# Mid Suffolk District Councillors' Report – September 2022

## The Financial Outlook

At the Cabinet Meeting held on 5<sup>th</sup> September a report was presented giving the first financial forecast for the current year 2022/23 based on the first three months actual performance and an extrapolation for the balance of the year. The Council is facing the same significant inflationary headwinds as individuals and businesses and this report was Members' first opportunity to see how these will impact 2022/23. Employee costs account for roughly 40% of the council's expenditure and the national pay settlement – proposed at a flat amount for all employees – is significantly ahead of the 2.2% budgeted. The council is also facing increases on gas, electricity, fuel, some contracts and on interest payable. The current estimate of the total of these additional cost pressures is £1.184million.

The Council must approve a balanced budget each year, it cannot run a deficit, but in Mid Suffolk's case this was achieved by transferring over £3.3million TO reserves even after freezing council tax. In addition, £500k was carried forward from last year as an Inflationary Pressures Reserve. The council is therefore still able to forecast a very comfortable surplus outturn although there is no room for complacency. Many other district and borough councils will not be in this fortunate position and there is a likelihood that the government will need to provide some financial assistance – as was the case to all councils during the Covid pandemic.

With our workforce being a shared workforce with Babergh District Council, who are in a less fortunate financial position, this could raise challenges as we start to develop the budget for the forthcoming year 2023/24. Mid Suffolk aspires to keep council tax as low as possible whilst maintaining long-term sustainability.

## Independent Remuneration Panel

District councillors receive a taxable allowance for their council duties, which are supplemented with special responsibility allowances for those councillors who have additional responsibilities such as Cabinet roles or chair committees. These allowances are evaluated and recommended by an Independent Remuneration Panel (IRP). Allowances were last agreed in 2018 although they have been linked to staff pay for annual adjustment up until March 2022. The IRP has now put forward its new recommendations to come into effect for 2023/24 and these will be presented to Full Council later this month.

## Full Council – 22<sup>nd</sup> September

In addition to the IRP Report mentioned above, the Full Council meeting in September will also receive and debate a report on the CIFCO Capital Ltd trading and performance for 2021/22 and a new Business Plan for going forward. With CIFCO now being fully invested and with capital values now moving in a positive direction, the new Business Plan will focus on income generation and sustainability improvements to the existing buildings within the portfolio. Full Council will also be presented with the Joint Treasury Management Outturn

for 2021/22 and a Joint Local Development Scheme for 2022-25. More details on these will follow in our next report.

### **Tree Canopy Cover Survey**

A Tree Canopy Cover Survey was presented to Cabinet at their September meeting. This report includes ward-by-ward Tree Canopy data for Mid Suffolk which is being published online in the form of interactive web maps. Using new technology, an accurate inventory of trees along with the ecosystems that these trees provide, has been created. Local parish councillors may be interested to know that the average canopy cover in Mid Suffolk is 8.5% with wards ranging from 6.0% in Stow Thorney (Stowmarket) to 12.8% in the Claydon and Barham Ward. Yes, our local ward has the highest concentration of trees in Mid Suffolk. The next phase of work is to determine tree planting locations which will achieve the greatest impact to society – to include areas with high levels of pollution, high social deprivation, those close to roads and areas at risk of flooding.

### **More details on our website**

These reports can only ever be a very brief update and both parish councillors and residents are encouraged to visit our council website for regular news announcements and to obtain more details. The council also regularly uses social media to reach and inform residents.

**Tim Passmore & John Whitehead**

**(our contact details are on parish noticeboards and on the MSDC's website)**