



## **TOWN AND PARISH COUNCIL NEWSLETTER**

**December 2013**

**Welcome to our joint newsletter aimed at keeping all the town and parish councils, across both Babergh and Mid Suffolk, informed about our plans to meet the financial and other challenges facing us.**

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### **Town and Parish Council Liaison Meetings**

As you know, Babergh and Mid Suffolk held their most recent Town and Parish Council Liaison Meetings on the 27<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> of November, inviting members of Town and Parish Councils to come into the District Council offices and discuss the challenges that we all face with Councillors and Officers. We hope the information you were able to gain from these face to face meetings is useful, and for those who were unable to attend due to prior commitments we'll cover the key topics discussed at the meetings in this news letter.

#### **Localism**

Tom Barker, Corporate Manager for Strong Communities at Babergh and Mid Suffolk, discussed the impact of the Localism agenda on the role of Local Government. This included the local and national circumstances that these changes are taking place in, including nationwide Public Service reform, cuts throughout the public sector and more specific funding challenges that are faced at a County/District level.

Government on both a local and national level is meeting some of these challenges by devolving power to communities and introducing new community rights. In particular, three sets of community rights were focused upon:

### Neighbourhood Planning:

The right of local communities to draw up their own Neighbourhood Plans and adopt planning policy in line with national legislation for their own area, rather than rely upon plans drawn up by the Local Authority.

#### *Interest and Support in Babergh and Mid Suffolk*

- High levels of interest in rural areas (6 applications, 10 other communities debating if appropriate for them)
- Is a Neighbourhood Plan the right tool? Need to understand local motivations/needs. Other options are available such as Village design statements, village plans, etc. but these do not have the same weight as a Neighbourhood Plan
- Planning and Communities services in the District Council provide joint support.

#### *Challenge and Issues*

- Relationships and historic mistrust
- Working alongside the Suffolk Voluntary and Community Sector or the Suffolk Association of Local Councils?
- Risks re applications received (under the National Planning Policy Framework)

### Right to Bid on Assets of Community Value:

The right of local communities to designate important land or buildings in their area as Asset of Community Value, providing them with the right to pause any sale of that asset for a period of up to six months, during which a community group can prepare their own bid to purchase and run it as a Community Interest Company (or other business model such as Industrial and Provident Society)

#### *Interest and Support in Babergh and Mid Suffolk*

- 15 enquiries – 10 of which are pubs/former pubs, 4 listed so far.
- 5 of which are about a more general discussion about a range of community assets.

#### *Challenge and Issues*

- A need for a clear definition of 'community value' and clear criteria are critical to prevent risk of legal challenge
- A period of recent community use of an asset is required to designate it an Asset of Community Value
- Identifying or building groups capable of running the facility
- Expressions of interest has potential to be divisive
- No guarantee of community acquisition.

### Right to Challenge:

The right of local communities to challenge to take over and run local services which they believe could be better administered and delivered in their hands than in the hands of the current service provider.

#### *Interest and Support in Babergh and Mid Suffolk*

- None received in Suffolk, which is consistent with the national picture
- Informal route taken in preference to formal process invoking the Right to Challenge

#### *Challenge and Issues*

- How will decisions be made if challenged on joint services?
- Potential to open the door for larger organisations to bid rather than the intended community groups

Tom discussed these rights and also outlined their place in the context of Babergh and Mid Suffolk. Already Babergh and Mid Suffolk have a combined total of approximately £900,000 set aside for community funding each year, and are keen to support local communities exploring the new community rights. The Communities Team, working across both Babergh and Mid Suffolk, will continue to support and work with local groups and Parish Councils in investigating and pursuing these rights.

## **Financial Outlook**

Barry Hunter, the Corporate Manager – Financial Services at Babergh and Mid Suffolk delivered an update to the Liaison Meetings on the financial situation that the councils are facing. As you will already know the financial challenge facing all councils just keeps getting tougher. This not only affects Babergh, Mid Suffolk and other upper tier councils but is beginning to impact on Town and Parish Councils - as a result of the Government's proposed core funding reductions over the next 4 years and the possible introduction of Council Tax Referenda Thresholds.

Babergh and Mid Suffolk are facing a 30% year on year reduction in core funding from Revenue Support Grant over this period, resulting in a forecast combined budget gap of £11m due to this and estimated cost pressures.

In considering our strategic priorities going forward, we are looking to establish a clear strategic plan, combined with a medium term financial strategy and plan that will determine what we do and how we do it. This will be informed by applying 'Priority Based Budgeting' so we can determine where we should focus our resources and how these should be allocated to specific projects and services.

The key aim is to ensure that, within 5 years, the Councils are sustainable notwithstanding the reduced core funding. To achieve this, we need to do a number of things:

- Identify and quantify opportunities for savings through transformation
- Develop a longer term budget picture
- Reduce our dependence on core grant
- Maximising return on our investment
- Increasing our borrowing to invest to save
- Further sustainable growth to increase income e.g. Business Rates and New Homes Bonus
- Only do those things where a clear business case demonstrates it makes sense

The picture going forward for Town and Parish spending, their precepts and resulting Council Tax demand will increasingly need to look at the medium as well as the short term, especially if the Government introduces Council Tax Referenda Thresholds next year. These will limit precept levels and there is the potential cost of a referendum.

As with other councils, sustainable growth will increasingly be important to future income streams for Towns and Parishes. We will continue to work with SALC and Town and Parish Councils both collectively and individually on all of this.

## **Transformation and the Financial Challenge Facing the Public Sector**

Paul Little, Babergh and Mid Suffolk's Interim Corporate Manager – Transformation delivered a presentation outlining the challenges that national financial circumstances are presenting the public sector, including all tiers of local government. Paul examined the need for transformation and the approach Babergh and Mid Suffolk are taking to it: officers were paired with District Council Members across the Districts and a variety of Community Engagement work and events were held throughout last summer. The feedback gathered at these events has been instrumental in shaping the corporate objectives of both Councils during this transformation.

The cornerstone of the transformation are six Transformation Enquiry Groups (TEGs) led by District Councillors and composed of Councillors, senior council officers and support staff. Each of the six TEGs covers a different area and reflect the corporate objectives, shaped by our community engagement work:

- Promoting Sustainable Economic Growth
- Enhancing The Environment
- Increasing the supply, mix and economic impact of Housing
- Supporting and Facilitating Healthy, Safe and Active Communities
- Transforming Public Access
- Transforming Corporate Organisation and Resources

These TEGs aim to develop long term plans to meet the financial challenges the Councils face over the next 3-4 years and how we can meet the needs of our communities. Their outputs so far can be summarised as:

- A commitment to sustainable growth – more jobs and homes across Babergh and Mid Suffolk
- An aim to support communities to become more self sufficient, plus more focus on the most vulnerable
- Short term changes to how we use resources, such as services provided by Customer Service Direct
- A longer term view – the Councils have started to identify how we re-align ourselves to achieve what the TEGs expect

More detailed output thus far focusing on the TEGs that are looking specifically at the services and support we provide to our communities in future.

### Housing TEG Suggestions:

- To aim to increase the total number of homes within the two districts with emphasis on needs of older and younger people, size, quality, design, sustainability and affordability
- To increase the level of economic activity through a house building programme, which will contribute towards sustainable growth in business rates income
- To use our own resources/assets and influence to get what is seen to be the right sort of increase in supply of houses across the two districts
- For social housing tenants to be supported through the welfare reform changes in order to ensure that they have housing that they can afford. This work will seek to mitigate the impact of welfare reform changes on tenants and the councils' rental income streams

### Economy TEG Suggestions:

- Increase new homes - This will aim to achieve a significant uplift in the delivery levels of available housing within the two districts
- An increase in sustainable business growth and associated Business Rate income. By knowing and building relationships with our local and regional businesses we aim to be a problem solver, a facilitator for sustainable growth
- An increase in the skills needed by local business within the local workforce. By knowing the businesses in the area and the schools (schools audits) we aim to bring these two elements, education and employers, together
- A change in our political and professional culture to commit to being 'open for business' and pro-growth. Helping District Council staff and Members understand the economic impacts of our decisions will improve our cultural commitment to sustainable growth

### Environment TEG Suggestions:

- Ensure that Planning Policies support the Councils' vision and Corporate Priorities and balance growth of the local economy with protection of the environment
- That the Councils diversify approaches to land management, grounds maintenance, public toilets and other assets – more responsibility and ownership to the communities in which these assets are based
- Exploit opportunities to reduce the carbon footprint of districts and generate income through renewable energy schemes, such as the installation of solar panels on Council housing stock & corporate buildings
- Reduce waste and increase recycling by developing a publicity campaign in partnership with Suffolk County Council and other Waste Management Authorities

### Communities and Health and Well Being TEG Suggestions:

- That the Councils determine new approaches to building community capacity and self reliance, to identify gaps and ensure our resources are matched to the local need
- Use grants and assets with communities, and develop community hubs to achieve corporate outcomes
- Support communities taking part in activity to promote health and fitness to improve health and well being across the districts
- Establish councils' commitments to health promotion work; exploit potential for joint working with other groups to reduce cost and remove duplication of work, ensuring scarcer resources are efficiently targeted where they are most needed
- Target councils' role in night-time economy and develop options for reducing costs

The direction provided by the TEGs are aimed at building long term plans for how the Councils can best help support their districts, however there have been several decisions that will result in actions in the short term.

- Babergh and Mid Suffolk aim to have an integrated, in-house finance service system by the 1<sup>st</sup> of April 2014.
- Similarly, Babergh and Mid Suffolk aim to have a shared ICT service with Suffolk County Council in place by June 2014
- We aim to have in-house HR transactional service by 1<sup>st</sup> April 2014
- We also aim to move to an in-house customer services function, again by 1<sup>st</sup> April 2014

These changes will result on savings and help focus the use of officer time, making us more efficient.

- We are currently evaluating our accommodation needs and the options for future use of these assets – especially the main HQ buildings in Needham and Hadleigh

Given the importance of identifying what our communities expect from the Council and our ambitions to work with communities to reshape what we do, there is a vital role for Town and Parish Councils to play. Towns and Parishes have a detailed understanding of their local areas and are well placed to make a conversation with local communities happen. Communities are telling us that they want more joined up work between County, District and Town and Parish Councils and this sort of work will help make us all more efficient and more able to deliver for our communities.

As the Transformation work continues we will be looking at the opportunities to work closely with you as Town and Parish Councils and Councillors. The reality of shrinking resources will require us to all come together and we look forward to building stronger relationship with you and finding the best ways to work together.

If you want to view the slides used to deliver any of this information at the Meetings you can find the three presentations online, posted in our Key Partners News and Information Area:

- **Babergh:** <http://www.babergh.gov.uk/council-business/smaller-smarter-swifter-babergh-and-mid-suffolk-working-together/the-story-so-far/key-partners-news-and-information-area/>
- **Mid Suffolk:** <http://www.midsuffolk.gov.uk/council-business/smaller-smarter-swifter-babergh-and-mid-suffolk-working-together/the-story-so-far/key-partners-news-and-information-area/>

### **Warm Homes Healthy People Fund 2013-14**

Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils are joining local authorities across the Suffolk to support those who are worried about the cost of heating their home or struggling to keep warm. The Warm Homes Healthy People fund is designed to support those most in need: if you know anyone in need of extra support to keep warm, please do let them know about the fund and help them apply.

The funding can offer, subject to eligibility:

- a free home energy survey carried out by an independent surveyor,
- emergency boiler repairs, or
- free temporary heater loan;
- help with cost of the home insulation
- energy- efficiency measures including draught proofing,
- assistance with paying fuel bills.

People could qualify for the **free survey** if they own or privately rent their home and:

- someone living in the property is over 60 or under 5 years old or
- someone living in the property is in receipt of a disability or means tested benefit or
- the property is within Council Tax band A-C

Call **08456 037 686**, Monday - Friday, 9am - 5pm, for more information or to book a survey. Appointments are available during evenings and weekends as well as during the day. You can find more information on our websites:

- Babergh: <http://www.babergh.gov.uk/environment/energy-and-climate-change/news/>
- Mid Suffolk: <http://www.midsuffolk.gov.uk/environment/energy-and-climate-change/news/>

### **New Recycling Campaign due in the New Year**

In 2014 Babergh and Mid Suffolk plan to run a campaign encouraging residents to recycle more of their waste. The campaign will be about encouraging residents to recycle as much as possible and by so doing enabling scarce financial resources to be directed towards other Council services. We are all doing a good job but we all need to do even more. We all know recycling helps the environment and saves valuable resources but it can also help protect valued services: it costs your councils around £100 to dispose of a tonne of waste to landfill but only about £50 to recycle it, which means for every extra tonne we recycle we could spend £50 on other services. So a few more tin cans, plastic bottles and glass jars recycled all adds up.

I would urge you to spread the word and start raising awareness of the opportunities for recycling within your own parish. More information on our recycling campaign will be sent out in subsequent editions of the newsletter.

### **2014 Community Achievement Awards in Babergh**

Babergh District Council is taking part in the Community Achievement Awards, which are now in their 22nd year and aim to give recognition to those individuals and groups who strive to make a real difference in their communities and to make them better places in which to live and work. As such we're on the lookout for young people, individuals, voluntary groups and businesses that make its communities special and would urge you to spread the word and to nominate anyone you think deserves recognition for the hard work they put into their community.

The award categories are:

- Outstanding contribution made by a young person or group of young people 18 years or under.
- Selfless service by an individual (over 18) to a voluntary body or to the community;
- Voluntary or community group that improves the quality of life for residents in our district.
- Outstanding business contribution to the well-being of the community.

Nomination forms have already been sent to schools, businesses, voluntary groups and charities and Babergh is urging anyone who knows someone who should be recognised for their achievements to quickly grab a form and nominate.

The deadline for return of nominations is December 20 2013 at 4pm, with judging taking place early in the New Year. All winners will be notified in January and will be invited to an awards ceremony being held on April 3, 2014, at the Stoke by Nayland Club. Mark Murphy, from BBC Radio Suffolk will comper the achievement awards ceremony and Prolog, of Sudbury, will sponsor the event for the 13th year.

Parish and Town Councillors may already have been sent a nomination form, but for another copy email [kate.lowe@babergh.gov.uk](mailto:kate.lowe@babergh.gov.uk) , or download one directly from the Babergh website at:

<http://www.babergh.gov.uk/your-community/babergh-community-achievement-awards-scheme/>

Keep an eye open for details of the Mid Suffolk Community Achievement Awards in a future newsletter!

### **Discussing the Babergh and Mid Suffolk Integration Experience with the MJ**

In November the leaders of Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils, Councillor Jennie Jenkins and Councillor Derrick Haley, joined Charile Adan, the Chief Executive of both Councils, to discuss the integrated staffing structure with the Municipal Journal's magazine, The MJ. This follows The MJ Achievement Award that Babergh and Mid Suffolk won in June for their Shared Services.

With the kind permission of The MJ a copy of the interview is now hosted on the Babergh and Mid Suffolk websites, which you can read online at:

[http://www.babergh.gov.uk/assets/Uploads-BDC/Corporate/MSDC-BDC-Transformation-Insight-Interview\\_2.pdf](http://www.babergh.gov.uk/assets/Uploads-BDC/Corporate/MSDC-BDC-Transformation-Insight-Interview_2.pdf)  
<http://www.midsuffolk.gov.uk/assets/UploadsMSDC/Organisation/Communication/Achievements/MSDC-BDC-Transformation-Insight-Interview.pdf>

### **Waste and Recycling Calendars**

October's Newsletter was sent out with the Christmas and 2013 Waste Collection Calendars attached. Please do remember that waste collection dates can be different over the Christmas period and do consult the calendar to ensure you don't miss your bin collection day. You can now find the calendars online:

Babergh Waste Collection Calendar:

<http://www.babergh.gov.uk/waste-services/household-waste-and-recycling/collection-days/>

Mid Suffolk Waste Collection Calendar:

<http://www.midsuffolk.gov.uk/waste-services/household-waste-and-recycling/collection-days/>

### **What do you think?**

We value the comments of our town and parish council colleagues on how we plan to meet the financial and other challenges facing us.

If your council has any comments about our plans then please email us – and we will reply as quickly as possible.

For Babergh [workingtogether@babergh.gov.uk](mailto:workingtogether@babergh.gov.uk)  
For Mid Suffolk [workingtogether@midsuffolk.gov.uk](mailto:workingtogether@midsuffolk.gov.uk)



## **Keeping you informed**

Our councils have set aside a section on both our websites where town and parish councils as well as other key stakeholders can access information of particular relevance to them, including these newsletters.

These can be found at either:

[www.midsuffolk.gov.uk/workingtogether/keypartnersarea](http://www.midsuffolk.gov.uk/workingtogether/keypartnersarea)

or:

[www.babergh.gov.uk/babergh/KeyPartnersArea](http://www.babergh.gov.uk/babergh/KeyPartnersArea)

Thanks for reading this.