

District councillor's annual report, 2012/2013

During 2012/13 the following achievements were made by Mid Suffolk District Council:

- **Integration** with Babergh District Council has commenced and savings are being realised. We have reduced our management to just three layers operating across two councils and cutting the number of posts by over 50%. As a result we are now achieving annual savings of £1.8m per year across both councils, equivalent to annual revenue savings of over 9% per year.
- **Mid Suffolk Website** - the new Mid Suffolk website went live in 2012 and is available at <http://midsuffolk.gov.uk>. It has the same look and feel as Babergh's new website, but operates independently. Once the integration of the two councils is complete, the aim will be to progress to a single website, which still maintains the identity of each council but allows a joined-up approach to services and information delivery.
- **Eye – A Castle Connected** - This year-long Heritage Lottery funded project is working with three local schools and local community groups to restore and conserve Eye Castle and to create new interpretation to improve visitor understanding of the site and its place in Eye.

New interpretation for the castle will show the historic importance of Eye Castle and how it has shaped the surrounding town. New technologies are being used, with a smartphone app in development. Design company Bronze software are working with teachers and pupils across the curriculum from Hartismere School to develop ideas and designs for the app. On site interpretation will include artwork designed by pupils from Occold Primary, St Peter and St Paul CEVAP School, Eye and Hartismere High. Whilst the project is only for a year, the aim is to create a lasting legacy for the future of Eye Castle, ensuring its place in the community.

- **Suffolk Hedgerow Survey** - December 2012 saw the publication of the Suffolk Hedgerow Survey report, the culmination of 12 years of work. In Mid Suffolk, volunteers from 74 parishes were supported whilst taking part in the survey with training, advice, publicity and resources. Over 10,500 boundaries were surveyed. The completed report and the data gathered will be a valuable resource for farmers, planners and conservationists seeking to protect existing hedges, identifying key wildlife corridors and when deciding what species to plant. The data is all being digitised by the Suffolk Biological Records Centre.
- **Suffolk Flame Festival** - The Mid Suffolk District Council Communities Team organised a Flame Celebration on 24th August 2012 to help mark the momentous occasion of the Paralympic Flame travelling to Suffolk before the start of The Games. Working alongside Optua and Suffolk County Council, the council organised a family-friendly event at Needham Lake which was suitable for people of all abilities, including a twilight lantern procession, sports zone, art installations, creative workshops, concerts, walkabout performances and a flame finale performance on the lake itself.

A total of 5,000 people attended throughout the day and we estimate that 20% of the audience had some form of disability.

- **John Peel Centre for Creative Arts** - Helped the John Peel Centre for Creative Arts achieve funding towards Phase 3 of the building work, which has transformed the space, including installing a mezzanine floor, toilets, box office, kitchen and cafe/bar to help create a first-class practice and performance space.

- **Successful lobbying** - In a highly unusual move at a late stage in the process of setting the council grant for 2013/14, the government announced the Efficiency Support for Services in Sparse Areas Grant. This has basically meant some rural councils – including both Babergh and Mid Suffolk - will receive a small amount of extra funding in acknowledgement of the challenges of providing services to our very sparsely spread populations. We believe that this concession to the bias against rural councils in the grant formula is the result of direct lobbying by both our councils and via the Rural Service Network, of which we are part.
- **Tenant Involvement** – A senior Tenant Involvement Officer has been appointed and is establishing a new governance structure which places more tenants firmly at the heart of decision making. The aim is to achieve a range of opportunities for our tenants to be involved in the business.

In addition, the following were achieved jointly with Babergh District Council:

Meeting the housing needs of our communities

- **Homeless Prevention Fund** - Babergh and Mid Suffolk members have recently approved the creation of a Homelessness Prevention Fund. The fund is used to provide interest free loans to people facing homelessness where this would prevent them losing their home or enable them to access alternative accommodation. A typical use is the provision of financial assistance to access a private rented tenancy or to enable a successful application to the governments Mortgage Rescue Scheme.

Making our environment cleaner and greener

- **Clean Britain Awards** – The Clean Britain Awards are run by the Chartered Institution of Waste Management and the British Cleaning Council and are open to all local authorities. The awards recognise the efforts being made by local authorities to drive up standards in local environmental quality and creating cleaner public spaces and communities.

Each authority area receives an unannounced, anonymous inspection with the judge visiting several locations and assessing 13 key criteria, including general litter, chewing gum and smoking-related litter, fly-tipping, graffiti and the provision and condition of litter bins.

The CIWM grades each authority area with between 1 and 5 stars (5 being the highest score). As 2012 was the first Babergh and Mid Suffolk joint entry, we were very pleased to retain our 5 star status.

- **Textiles Recycling Scheme** – The Suffolk Waste Partnership introduced a textile recycling scheme across Suffolk in the summer of 2012. Households across Suffolk all received an introductory pack containing two specially designed textiles recycling bags. So far over 400 tonnes of textiles have been collected and recycled across Suffolk.

A recent analysis of refuse bins in Suffolk revealed around 7,000 tonnes of clothing and textiles end up in landfill each year. This costs the taxpayers more than £600,000 in disposal fees. It is this material that the scheme aims to capture and recycle. However, Suffolk Waste Partnership has urged residents to continue to donate to charity shops, or their local textile banks as it is not these textiles that we hope to capture.

Improving the health and well-being of our communities

- **Food Hygiene Rating System** – Babergh and Mid Suffolk are adopting the national Food Hygiene Rating system (FHRS) to replace the current ‘Scores on the Doors’ schemes. Like the Scores on the Doors system, it helps consumers choose where to eat out or shop for food by giving them information about the hygiene standards in food premises at the time they were inspected and through this, encourages businesses to improve their standards.

The overarching aim is to reduce the incidence of food-borne illness and the associated costs to the economy – around one million people suffer from food poisoning every year at an estimated cost to the economy of £1.5 billion.

Restaurants, takeaways, cafes, sandwich shops, pubs, hotels, supermarkets and other retail food outlets, as well as other businesses where consumers can eat or buy food, are given a hygiene rating as part of the scheme.

There are six hygiene ratings on a simple numerical scale ranging from ‘0’ (urgent improvement necessary) at the bottom of ‘5’ (very good) at the top.

Consumers can access ratings at food.gov.uk/ratings or via free phone apps and businesses are encouraged to display stickers and certificates showing their rating at their premises.

MSDC and Babergh were awarded a grant of approximately £10k by the FSA to implement the scheme and this has been used to backfill the staff time needed to get the FHRS going.

- **Suffolk Health Inequalities Conference** – a conference to promote a debate about reducing health inequalities in Suffolk was hosted by Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils on 30th March 2012. The event was organised to coincide with the second anniversary of the national Marmot Review ‘Fair Society, Healthy Lives’. The review in 2010 identified local government as a key partner in addressing the social determinants of health inequalities.

The conference looked at the way ‘Marmot’ had influenced improvements in inequalities and wellbeing in Suffolk. In particular, examining how, in a county with two tier local government, the districts, boroughs, statutory partners and community groups can best contribute to meeting the recommended outcomes of the review.

The keynote speaker for the day was Dr Mike Grady, one of the authors for the Marmot Review. The Suffolk-wide conference was organised by Babergh and Mid Suffolk Councils and run in association with the Suffolk health and Wellbeing Board and provided a springboard for the work that has been done in Suffolk during 2012/13.

- **Health and Wellbeing Pilot Projects** - Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils are playing a leading role in developing a Health and Wellbeing Strategy over the coming months, engaging with the new Clinical Commissioning Groups and actively influencing the work of the Suffolk Health and Wellbeing Board.

Developing strong and resilient communities

- **Community Funding Roadshows** - These provided a new approach to disseminating information on how to attract external funding to community groups, bringing over 100 smaller VCS groups together for networking. The first event was so well attended that a

second was organised, which was also filled to capacity. Both events were held in Bildeston (Chamberlin Hall) to serve both districts.

- **Community Engagement 2012:** Councillors from both councils worked with the Integrated Management Team and met with local community groups and communities of interest, in order to gain intelligence and insights to help inform and develop the new strategic priorities for both councils.
- **Emergency Planning** - We produced our first quarterly newsletter in December which is available on the Suffolk Resilience Website, the www.getpreparednow.co.uk website as well as Babergh's & Mid Suffolk's web sites. It is our intention that this newsletter will become sustained by the community groups as they grow and develop and gain the confidence to produce articles

Financial Information

Mid Suffolk District Council took advantage of the Government's Council Tax freeze and therefore there has been no increase in our part of 2013/14 Council Tax bills.

Key Strategic Priority Outcomes as at Quarter 3

- Twenty-one private dwellings were returned to occupation by the end of December 2012. It is expected that the year end outcome of thirty will be met by the end of March 2013.
- Number of council dwellings adapted to meet the needs of older or disabled people has exceeded the year end outcome figure of forty. At the end of December 2012, ninety-six major and minor adaptations had been carried out.
- Outcome of >99% of local authority housing rent collected, exceeded by the end of December 2012 by .67%.
- The number of Voluntary and Community Services (VCS) organisations supported has exceeded the year end outcome at the end of December. 186 projects have been supported, drawing in £845k in external funding.
- As at 31 December there were no non-decent properties in Mid Suffolk District Council's housing stock.
- Performance for determining planning applications is exceeding the national target and, therefore, the council's outcome measures in both categories.

Next steps: some key challenges in 2013/14

We are now building on our new structure, systems, policies, processes and culture to take better advantage of new opportunities for all our communities over the next 12 months, including:

- Transformation reviews aimed at radically changing how we go about securing community outcomes
- Playing a more strategic part in the development of the Suffolk Growth Strategy and our Suffolk Business Rates pool through clear political leadership and the alignment of resources
- Working with Suffolk partners to develop new solutions for the delivery of corporate functions including front/back office solutions and a shared local government legal service