

**Somersham****Building Services Review**

Two experienced specialists are working alongside Babergh and Mid Suffolk officers to carry out an in-depth review of the council's Building Services to improve performance. They have found that a number of our properties do not have up-to-date annual heating safety checks, five-year electrical installation checks or asbestos re-inspections. In addition some properties do not have carbon monoxide monitors. Data and record keeping around health and safety compliance is not accurate.

These issues are being addressed as an urgent priority.

**Revenue Forecast**

As 30th September the forecast is that the Council will overspend its budget by £839k. If this is the final figure £500k will be met from the council's Inflation Reserve and the intended transfer to the Growth & Efficiency Fund will be reduced to £3.012m.

There are increases, some quite dramatic, in the cost of electricity, gas, fuel, interest, and contracts, for instance those for waste, leisure etc. In addition the national pay award of £1,925 from 1 April 2022 will add £638k to the pay bill. Employee costs are 40% of the Council's expenditure.

**Capital Underspend?**

Disable Facilities Grant has spent £165k out of a budget of £1,156k and is forecast to spend just £454k by the year end. The £580k set aside for electric buses to provide low carbon local services where no commercial services exist has not been spent. The Stowmarket Leisure Centre is forecast to spend just £300k of a £1,422k budget. The plan is to re-roof and clad the building, to reduce energy use and thus costs and carbon footprint.

The administration needs to get done these things that will improve residents' lives.

**The Housing Account**

Housing suffers the issues outlined above plus a significant increase in costs for repairs and servicing, with some materials more than doubling in price. These are forecast to lead to an £892k overspend after a £279k increase in charges.

Much of this is due to the use of sub-contractors to support the trades team to reduce the backlog of jobs that could not progress during Covid.

**Energy Saving**

A desktop exercise with the Energy Savings Trust has evaluated every property within the council's housing stock. We now know the current energy efficiency levels, what could be achieved, and the level of investment required. The 'hardest to heat' homes will be targeted first.

**Cost of Living Crisis:**

The cost-of-living crisis is a constant feature of the news and for many a personal experience. A report details Babergh & Mid Suffolk's work over the last 6 months and the plan for the next 6 months through the winter into the spring.

In Mid Suffolk the council has distributed a total of about £5.3 million of government money. The majority was as the £150 Council Tax Energy Rebate to households in tax bands A to D.

For the future the report says "Prevention is a key area of focus, to reduce those falling into crisis. Early intervention will be critical, such as greater use of our warm handover provision. We also need to ensure our front-line teams are equipped with the knowledge and skills to recognise early support needs and know the best way to support our residents."

## County Deal

It is looking increasingly certain that a "County Deal" will be signed shortly putting an elected leader into the County Council in place of a leader elected by the largest party. It will be interesting to see how that works: what problems would beset say a Liberal Democrat heading a conservative council?

We do not yet know what powers would be devolved although wider authority over highways and transport is likely. Perhaps there will be clarity by next month. Even if there is the associated legislative changes will take considerable time.

## Planning

You will have heard that the housing targets that we have suffered for years are about to disappear, just as we approve sufficient applications to meet 10.8 years demand. If one tried to invent a plan to introduce chaos it would be difficult to do better. Another strong possibility is that the ban on onshore windfarms which has existed since David Cameron is about to vanish.

Perhaps we will have a group of turbines to go with the solar farms that are still wending their way forward slowly. I tend to find both acceptable provided they are distributed and have local battery storage to limit the need for grid lines.

## Gateway 14

Last month I reported many parameters of this site but not the fact that the roof will support some 700kW of solar PV panels at 410 watt per 2 sq M panel this would require around 1700, covering perhaps 3400 sq. m. A lot better than nothing but you can see the unrealised potential. A pity we are told that the power network can't accommodate more despite approval to connect for a solar farm the opposite side of the B1113.

You can see that the roof would support about 25,000 panels assuming only half the area has the correct slope and that would yield 10.25 MW in bright sun. With a say 20 MWh battery in 10 standard containers it would make quite a difference to the site power needs. We can but hope someone will make the investment.

If you have queries, please phone me on 07756292320 or email me at: [john.field@mid\\_suffolk.gov.uk](mailto:john.field@mid_suffolk.gov.uk)