



## Mid Suffolk District Council

### Report for The Stonhams Ward – November 2017

#### **Stowmarket Offices Opened 17<sup>th</sup> October**

A new service has opened in Stowmarket, offering easy access to Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils' residents.

The new location, at 54 Ipswich Street, Stowmarket IP14 1AD, will allow residents to access Mid Suffolk and Babergh District Councils' services directly, without requiring appointments booked in advance.

Residents will be able to visit the office any time between 9am and 5pm, Monday to Thursday, and 9am to 4.30pm on Fridays, bank holidays excepted.

Babergh and Mid Suffolk's staff will be based at 54 Ipswich Street, which has previously been home only to Suffolk County Council staff, and will help residents access council services directly. Residents will also be able to meet specific council officers at there by appointment, ensuring all council services can be accessed easily within the districts.

The Councils' Public Access Strategy, adopted in September last year, is designed to ensure residents can access council services in the most convenient way for them. The Councils have therefore improved introduced a a new website, and single phone number for all customer enquiries – 0300 1234 000. However the Councils recognise that some residents will still need to access services face to face, and the new service in Stowmarket ensures they are able to do so.

This ensures that residents in the district will continue to be able to access all council services in a 'walk in' centre in the districts when the councils' meetings move to Endeavour House later this year.

Cllr Suzie Morley, Mid Suffolk District Council's Lead Member for Customer Service, said: "As our council goes through changes to make it more efficient and provide better value for council taxpayers' money, we need to ensure our residents can continue to access our services and get the support they need.

"We have put a lot of work into our new website and into our simple, single phone number, but this new venue guarantees that our services will remain as accessible as ever even for those who aren't able to get online."

#### **Cabinets Vote to Investigate Future Relationship**

On Friday 13 October 2017, simultaneous Meetings of both Babergh's and Mid Suffolk's Cabinets voted on the options for exploring Babergh and Mid Suffolk's future relationship. The Cabinets resolved:

- That Cabinet provisionally endorses the approach of formally dissolving the two district councils; and creating of a new, larger, District Council;



- That the Councils utilise Transformation Funding to jointly conduct stakeholder, public and staff engagement during Autumn 2017.
- Subject to the outcome of that public engagement a draft (DCLG compliant) business case for the dissolution of BMSDCs and creation of a new single district council for the area could be considered by each Council.

Work will now commence on designing and delivering a full engagement process, covering the public, staff and all stakeholders.

### **Mid Suffolk Locality Funding Still Available**

Community groups, charities and organisations in Mid Suffolk are being urged to apply for funding as a Locality Awards programme launches for 2017. The deadline to apply has been extended until 16<sup>th</sup> February, 2018.

### **Have your say on new Joint Local Plan**

Babergh and Mid Suffolk are consulting on their draft Joint Local Plan: this document will shape development in the districts - and in all of our communities - for the next two decades. To find out more, including how to comment, visit our [Joint Local Plan page](#).

### **Mid Suffolk Consults on New Council Tax Proposals**

Mid Suffolk District Council has launched a consultation on changes to their Council Tax Reduction Scheme, which would make the scheme simpler and easier to access.

Mid Suffolk has unveiled proposals to change their Council Tax Reduction Scheme to reduce the burden of administration on residents accessing both the Council Tax Reduction and Housing Benefit schemes, treat customers' circumstances the same for both schemes and continue to support those customers most in need.

The changes also aim to make provision for the introduction of Universal Credit and align the current scheme with the Housing Benefit scheme Mid Suffolk operates.

To take part in the consultation visit the consultation page.

The consultation runs until 27th November.

The current Council Tax Reduction Scheme – which replaced Council Tax Benefit in 2013 – includes a maximum discount of 95% for the least well off residents, requiring just 5% of the bill to be paid. This discount will remain in place under the new proposals.

Over the last 4 years there have been a number of changes to Housing Benefit legislation, resulting in some residents seeing their circumstances being treated differently in application for support with Council Tax compared to Housing Benefit. The upcoming



introduction of Universal Credit will also significantly change how residents receive financial support.

Following the consultation a report will be produced and submitted to Mid Suffolk's Full Council Meeting in December, proposing the final changes come into effect on 1 April 2018.

Cllr John Whitehead, Mid Suffolk District Council Cabinet Member for Finance, said: "Our Council Tax Reduction scheme helps residents in the greatest need and we're proud to be able to support them in hard times, but sometimes the administration of different schemes can produce a headache for claimants when they least need them. These changes will ease that process and make the scheme easier to understand. Now is the chance for everyone to take a look at the proposals and let us know if we've got them right for our residents."