



Mid Suffolk District Council

Report for The Stonhams Ward – March 2017

Council Housing Officers feature in latest TV show

Two members of staff from Babergh and Mid Suffolk's Supported Living Schemes will once again feature in the latest series of the BBC One daytime show 'The Housing Enforcers'.

The fourth series of the show started on Monday this week and will air each weekday at 9.15 am until Friday 24 March 2017. It is hosted by presenter Matt Allwright and looks at the work of Local Authority Housing Officers who deal with a whole range of issues such as signing up new tenants, antisocial behaviour, overgrown gardens and environmental health-related matters.

Community Housing Officers Ian Watson and Andrew Weavers have been working with the producers of this show for the last two years and they have already appeared in series 2 and 3. In the current series, viewers will see Ian or Andrew in 10 episodes altogether, where their work on the front line will show them dealing with anything from 'right to buy' fraud and abandoned properties to attending evictions and serving notices.

Andrew Weavers said, "The programme producers and crew have been very supportive and it has been good to show the mixture of issues we deal with every day. Social worker, mediator, police officer, support worker and friendly face – these are just some of the people we are expected to be during the course of our work. We have no doubt changed people's lives or even saved them along the path of our careers."

Ian Watson said, "The shows have been fair and quite positive, not like some other benefits programmes, so when we were asked to do more programmes after series 2, I was quite happy to do this because of the way they portrayed our work."

CLLr Jan Osborne, Babergh District Council's Portfolio Holder for Housing said, "Our housing officers are a real credit to both councils and this programme shows just what an invaluable service they provide for our tenants. Viewers of the programme will see just how hard this team works to find solutions, even when they lie outside their normal area of activity, and the positive impact they have on people's lives."

CLLr Jill Willshaw, Mid Suffolk District Council's Member with Special Responsibility – Landlord Function said, "We know our tenants can have very individual needs and this programme does a great job of shining a light on just how hard our staff work to handle anything that is thrown at them. Their willingness to roll up their sleeves and do whatever it takes to solve problems and improve the lives of our tenants is a testament to the commitment and professionalism of the whole team."

Series Producer Kent Upshon said "We were really keen to open up the series this year, to look at the more human side of housing, and the challenges faced by both tenants and Housing Officers. Both Ian and Andrew were brilliant guides through today's housing crisis. There's an old cliché about there being no such thing as an average day as a housing officer, but our time in Suffolk and Babergh proved time and time again this to be true. Through them, we saw a huge range of different housing challenges, but the one thing that didn't change was Ian and Andrew's honest and professional approach to doing their jobs. We feel we really captured an authentic feel of what it's like to be on the front lines, and I know our viewers will feel the same".



Mid Suffolk Sets its Budget for 2017/18

Following a meeting of Mid Suffolk District Council's Full Council an increase of 1.64% in Council Tax was approved as councillors voted in favour of the 2017/18 budget.

The rise, voted on by Mid Suffolk Councillors on Thursday (23 February) evening, will mean that residents in the Mid Suffolk area who live in a Band D property will see a rise in their Council Tax of £2.61.

The increase was voted through as Mid Suffolk faces further cuts in core funding from central government. However, the council has pledged that those most in need will not pay more than 5 per cent of their council tax bill as it continues its Council Tax Reduction Scheme.

The key highlights from the meeting are:

- The increase in Council Tax of 1.64% which will see the largest properties paying £5.22 more over the course of the year, with the smallest seeing an increase of just £1.74.
- No change to the Council Tax Reduction Scheme for eligible residents, with residents most in need paying only 5% of their bill
- No significant change to service levels despite the reduction in government support, as income generation and cost reduction measures have replaced the loss in government grant
- A decrease of 1% on council house rents, equivalent to an average rent reduction of 84p a week as required by the Welfare Reform and Work Act
- Sheltered housing service charges to be increased by a maximum of £4 per week for each scheme, to reduce the subsidy from general needs housing by £80,000
- An increase of 10% on garage rents, equivalent to an average increase of 74p per week
- No change to utility charges for sheltered housing tenants
- A reduction of £1.5 million in the council's housing capital spend in 2017/18

Cllr John Whitehead, Mid Suffolk District Council's Portfolio Holder for Finance, said: "We in Local Government are facing a big financial challenge, with the central government grant reducing to zero over the next few years. In order to continue providing the services our communities need we are going to have to look at other options, and that does include council tax rises, but we are determined to keep this rise proportionate and as low as possible while still safeguarding our services.

"More than that, we are looking at generating more income to deliver our services: our Waste Team is widening their subscription services and we have taken a fresh look at the assets and investments we as a council hold, with our new Capital Investment Fund alone set to provide £250,000 in income. Every penny of this goes towards supporting the services our communities need, while the Community Infrastructure Levy we introduced last year has already raised over a quarter of a million to invest in key infrastructure."



"Local Access for Local People" As Councils' Agree Community Based Locations for Future Services

Residents of Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils will have improved community based locations for customer access points as both authorities continue to deliver their programme of better services for residents.

The programme, which will also see the Headquarters of both councils move to Endeavour House in Ipswich has announced that the locations of the customer services points will be in Stowmarket and Sudbury.

“From day one of this important project we have been clear that for those residents who need it face to face contact will remain sacrosanct.” said Councillor Jennie Jenkins, Leader of Babergh District Council. “Our work to introduce modern and friendly digital services will ensure communicating with the councils is easier and more cost effective than ever. We do remain passionate though about providing walk in advice and guidance. That’s why we’re delighted that we will have a continued presence at the heart of our communities.”

Current public access to services for both councils can be antiquated, confusing, difficult and bureaucratic. Despite low levels of residents making visits to Council Offices in both districts Councillors of both Councils have made clear their desire to ensure there continues to be an access point in each district.

“We will be delivering modern and customer friendly digital services to our local residents, many of whom will already be using online services on a regular basis for their banking and their shopping.” said Councillor Nick Gowrley, Leader of Mid Suffolk District Council. “We have made the decision to end the expensive and inefficient maintenance of two HQs but we also recognise the need to continue to have customer service points in the communities we serve.”

“That is what we have done and I am delighted that in Stowmarket and Sudbury we will be able to offer face to face support for any of our residents that need it.”

The specific locations in the towns will be announced in due course.



Prolific Fly-Tipper Fined £2000

A 36 year old man from Ipswich has been successfully prosecuted for fly-tipping and waste offences committed in both Babergh and Mid Suffolk during 2016.

On Tuesday 21 February 2017, Tommy Gorham, formally of Kingfisher Avenue, Ipswich, now residing at Upper Orwell Street, appeared before Ipswich Magistrates Court charged with four waste offences committed during 2016, including illegally fly-tipping waste in Bullen Lane, Bramford and also Church Lane, Sproughton.

Mr Gorham attended court and pleaded guilty to all four charges. The court took into account Mr Gorham's guilty plea before ordering him to pay penalties including a £400 fine, £590.44 clearance costs and £1,150 investigation and legal costs.

The first incident took place in January 2016, when a large amount of household and building waste was found to have been dumped on farmland in Bullen Lane, Bramford. Documents addressed to Mr Gorham, or to properties which he owned, were found amongst the waste and as a person responsible for renting out properties, Mr Gorham had a legal 'duty of care' to ensure that all waste from his business was disposed of correctly and that Waste Transfer Notes were retained.

The second incident took place in February 2016 when a large van load of household waste was found to have been fly-tipped at Church Lane, Sproughton. Once again, a piece of correspondence linked to a property owned by Mr Gorham was found in the waste.

Officers invited Mr Gorham to attend an interview under caution in relation to the matter, but after he repeatedly failed to attend, he was arrested so that he could be interviewed at the Police Investigation Centre in Martlesham. Mr Gorham denied dumping the waste at the locations. He was unable to account for how he dealt with waste arising from his rental properties, nor produce any paperwork for the waste, despite being issued with a notice to do so and having previously been advised about his responsibilities in relation to waste disposal in 2013.

James Buckingham, Corporate Manager – Sustainable Environment, for both Councils said "We are pleased with the outcome of this case, whereby a prolific fly-tipper has been brought to justice. It's good to see that the level of penalties given to Mr Gorham, even with the court taking account of his guilty plea, represent the cost of his crimes and the contempt he had shown for the environment and local community. Mr Gorham had a legal duty to ensure that waste from his business activities was disposed of properly. I hope this case will send a clear message to other offenders that we will not tolerate this behaviour and we will not hesitate to prosecute in such cases. The Environmental Protection Team at both Councils will continue to place a high priority on the investigation of fly-tipping and we are grateful to Suffolk Police for their assistance in arresting Mr Gorham so that we could interview him".

Cllr David Burn, Mid Suffolk's Environment Portfolio Holder added "Unfortunately, the cost of removing fly-tipping on public land falls to taxpayers, and on private land must be met by landowners. I am therefore, very pleased that the court has specifically ordered that Mr Gorham pay the full clearance costs that both the Councils and the landowner incurred as a result of his unacceptable actions".

The Councils are members of the Suffolk Tipping Action Group which aims to reduce fly-tipping across the county through the 'Tip-Off: stop fly-tipping in Suffolk' campaign. Individuals and Businesses have specific legal responsibilities in respect of waste. For further information, please visit <http://www.greensuffolk.org/recycling/fly-tipping/>