

District Councillor Report for Bramford January 2022

The Budget

The General Fund Budget 2022/2023 and Four-Year Outlook went to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the 13th of January. We looked into the budget for the next budget year and a 5 year projection of the accounts. The Local Government Settlement was only approved a couple of weeks ago and has boosted the funding up by £970,000. The CIFCO investment portfolio has now been completely filled and with 3 other funds is producing a steady and secure income of £2.75m which is 12% of the total income, which is now subsidising services within the council.

The council tax revenue is £6.96 m and the tax base will increase year on year. The cost of service is expected to be £8.741m. The council raises another £5.944 of other income including business rates predicted at £3.825m and grants on top.

Money has been put aside for wellbeing projects and £2.2m to do the 7 year replacement of the waste freighters, hopefully with hydrogen power, although this may not be in this budget year

This year's budget with no changes to council tax would produce a £3.379m surplus.

There is much debate within the administration on how to deal with this surplus, last year £5.1m was put into projects and service improvements, a lot has been invested in specialist planning officers to push developers on landscape and ecology, to help improve the standards of development.

The HRA Account

The Housing Revenue Account is the account for the council owned dwellings and has to be a stand alone account. It contains council rents, service charges and non-dwelling rents. This is set against the cost of maintaining the assets, depreciation and interest payments. This is not quite so health and is at a £70,000 surplus set to reduce. The big question with the administration is whether to introduce the government recommended increase to council rents of CPI +1 which would be a 4.1% increase, in the scrutiny meeting I asked for a piece of work looking at our rent levels compared with similar councils to fully evaluate where we are.

Both these accounts will be voted on in full council on the 24th of February in the council chamber.

Green leisure

After the climate change task force looked at the carbon created by the councils activities, the leisure facilities were identified as the second largest creator of carbon. Babergh and Mid Suffolk are now halfway through installing £2.8m of green energy measures in their leisure centres.

These are the measures being introduced;

Stowmarket has 500 solar panels generating 195kW and an air source heat pump
Stradbroke has 105 solar panels generating 40.6kW
Hadleigh has 380 solar panels generating 148.2 kW
Kingfisher Sudbury has 294 solar panels generating 111.7kW

The Wenham Depot will have 56 solar panels generating 21.8kW

All supply agreements are now green energy tariffs.

These measures are expected to save 269.9 tonnes of CO₂e per year a reduction of 5.6% of the annual emissions. This was achieved using £1.4m pounds worth of government funding.

Construction will start on a further £1.4m solar car port scheme this month, with bays to charge electric and hybrid cars.

Copdock interchange

The A14 junction 55 is a vital interchange for the region, linking the Port of Felixstowe with the Midlands and beyond via the M6 and M1, and Colchester, Chelmsford, London, the M25 and Stansted Airport to the south.

As part of an informal pre-application consultation on potential improvements to the junction, National Highways sought feedback on two possible options: either improving traffic flow by widening the existing carriageway and introducing left turn lanes, or slashing the volume of traffic using the junction by building a new link road for traffic travelling between the A12 (South) and A14 (East).

In their joint response, the councils back the new link road as the best way of tackling existing congestion and ensuring the efficient movement of goods from Freeport East, including Stowmarket's Gateway 14 - helping to ensure national, regional, and local economic prosperity and delivering the greatest benefits to the districts' communities and businesses.

Kind Regards

James Caston
District Councillor for Bramford