

Babergh District Councillor's Report

March 2024

Support pledged for environment, economy and communities – despite warning of ‘financial cliff edge’

In agreeing its 2024/25 budget, Babergh District Council has outlined its determination to create a ‘more resilient and sustainable future’ for the district, despite severe financial pressures.

As I said last month, we will increase Babergh’s element of council tax bills by 2.99%, which means a rise of £5.46 to £188.10 pa, or £3.62 per week, for a band D property. This is well below the rate of inflation.

Balancing the budget has only been achieved through the planned use of £1.1m of earmarked reserves. In total we are forecasting to use 48% of our earmarked reserves over the two years 2023/24 and 2024/25 – clearly not a sustainable position.

Looking at the four-year medium-term picture, with the uncertainty over funding we have had to make assumptions, which may or may not be accurate, but they are reasonable given what we know at this point in time. Based on these, we are likely to be looking at a cumulative budget gap of £6.7m and we have only £2.4m of useable reserves available, with the remaining reserves earmarked for specific purposes.

Council house rents will be increased by 7.7% (CPI + 1%) for general needs properties and by 9.4% £102.88 to £110.81 and the average weekly rent for affordable housing will increase by £11.13 from £144.51 to £155.63.

Council leaders warn of ‘catastrophic effect’ of Suffolk County Council budget plans

Proposed changes to Housing Related Support ‘could impact on our most vulnerable residents’.

Parking charges petition is heard as council considers next steps

‘We don’t want to lose free parking, but we have tough decisions to make’ – the message from Babergh councillors as a petition objecting to new tariffs is debated.

Tax premiums agreed for owners of second homes and empty properties

Councillors at Babergh District Council have agreed higher tax premiums for owners of second homes and long-term empty properties as part of a raft of measures to bring more homes back into use.

Council's loft insulation offer for Suffolk homes

Funding is available to help residents make their homes warmer and save money on their energy bills.

Making Suffolk's older properties more energy efficient and cheaper to run

A free event to explore how to make Suffolk's older homes more energy efficient is at The Hold in Ipswich on March 6th.

More of Suffolk's tree cover and orchards to be restored

Suffolk County Council has secured £201,213 from the government's Local Authority Treescapes Fund for 1,877 new trees in a bid on behalf of all Suffolk councils – including Babergh District Council. The funding will go toward planting and maintaining the trees – many of which will be 'standards', which are around six feet in height when planted.

May PCC Election

As you will be aware, the election of the Police and Crime Commissioner for Suffolk will be held on 2nd May.

A number of changes have also been announced under the Election Act to the electoral process including:

- a requirement for voters to reapply for a postal vote after three years
- the introduction of an online absent voting application process
- a limit on the number of people for someone can act as a proxy for
- the need to prove identity when applying to vote by post and by proxy
- voters who are unable to prove their identity by providing documentary evidence, will now have the option to ask someone they know to confirm their identity.
- British citizens living abroad are now eligible to register to vote in UK general elections, regardless of how long they've been living outside the UK, removing the previous 15-year time limit. It is estimated that three million more British citizens could be eligible to vote.

Promoting paperless billing

We are again promoting the option for residents to choose paperless billing across our social media channels, ahead of council tax bills hitting doormats for the coming year.

It's quick and easy to sign up, and as well as the environmental impact, we also save money in terms of print and postage.

Funding surgeries - supporting our communities

During March and April, council officers from our Communities and CIL teams are joining forces with Community Action Suffolk and the National Lottery to help spread the word about how council funding can be used in our districts.

Surgeries in Hadleigh and Stowmarket will target local VCFSE (voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise) groups, helping them to understand how community projects can receive financial support and how to secure it.

The first surgery is taking place at **Hadleigh Town Hall from 10am to 1pm on 25 March**. The second is being held at **Red Gables in Stowmarket from 10am to 1pm on 18 April**.

Sessions are free to attend, but attendees will need to book their space by [emailing the grants team](#).

Meetings

Cabinet, Council and Planning Committee meetings can be watched, either live or catch-up, on our [YouTube Channel](#).

For agendas and minutes, please visit the [Democratic Services homepage](#).

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