

To Chairman and Parish Councillors Holbrook Parish Council  
From Councillor Mary McLaren – Stour Ward  
Holbrook Parish Council – 18 September 2023



## **Babergh District Council Business**

No Full Council Meeting was held in August.

### **Joint Overview & Scrutiny Committee 21 August 2023**

As the Joint Chair of this Committee, I have resumed the role of BDC Chairman after a year away and was very pleased to chair a new committee of new councillors whose questioning was varied and rigorous and the 3-hour meeting kept to schedule with two very detailed presentations as follows: -

#### **1. The Council's Commercial property continues to generate income for each district.**

Babergh and Mid Suffolk's commercial property company CIFCO generated £2.5m in net income to support the council's finances last year, reports to the committee showed.

This means since CIFCO Capital Ltd was jointly established in 2017 it has generated a net income for the councils of £11.5m.

Babergh and Mid Suffolk District councils borrowed a total of £99.2m during previous administrations to invest in its commercial property portfolio. This now comprises of 21 properties based in the eastern region and beyond split across industrial, retail and office sectors to balance risk.

Income from the Portfolio made up 11% of Babergh's total income in 2022/2023

In 2022/2023 the company made a £10m loss following a 12% decrease in CIFCO's portfolio value overall due to commercial property responding to high inflation and increasing debt costs

#### **To quote the CIFCO Chairman Sir Christopher Haworth:-**

"The whole market has seen capital values decrease but we are still outperforming the industry benchmark, and have a robust portfolio and business plan in place that will see us continue to generate income for our shareholders (BDC & MSDC)

We also continue to identify opportunities to improve the quality and sustainability of our existing properties -so we are not only creating rental income growth but also reducing the environmental impact of our portfolio."

*Recommendation: - The Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee notes the CIFCO Business Trading and Performance Report and asks that the minutes of this meeting be taken into account when CIFCO is next considered at Full Council in September.*

While CIFCO is the council's commercial property arm the council also invests directly in property within the district for re-generation and housing delivery. In Babergh examples include Borehamgate Shopping Centre in Sudbury, employment land in Hadleigh and the redevelopment of its former council offices in Corks Lane, Hadleigh.

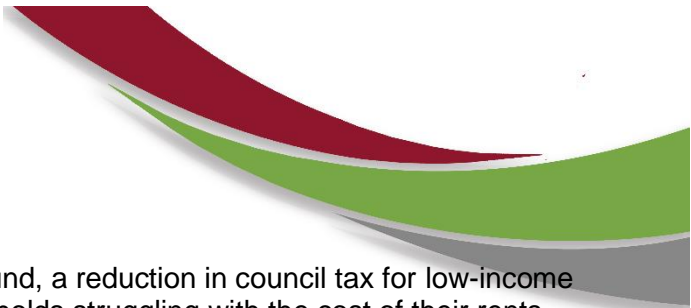
#### **2 Review of the support for residents struggling with the Cost-of-Living Crisis by Customer Services and the proposed Phase 3 of the Cost-of-Living Action Plan**

The report to the Committee detailed the weight of the cost of living on all our residents and highlighted the work the council/s have done to support residents through the crisis.



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This includes £100,000 through the household support fund, a reduction in council tax for low-income households and the awarding of over £150,000 to households struggling with the cost of their rents through Discretionary Housing Payments.

Sudbury Citizens Advice continues to experience a high demand for the service and received a 30% uplift in funding to accommodate demand. A separate payment is paid to Ipswich Citizens Advice to support the service they provide to residents in the east of the district.

627 homelessness applications for Babergh were received by Housing Solutions in 2022/2023. All applicants received advice and support to relieve their homelessness, and, in many cases, homelessness was prevented. The homelessness prevention fund supported 98 households.  
\*Homelessness does not include rough sleepers.

During the winter £110,995 was provided to 62 organisations through Winter Warmth Grants across both councils. Over 2000 people attended these community sessions where people could meet with their neighbours and friends to enjoy food, friendship, and activities.

Later this month councillors will also hear about the next phase of support to identify households that aren't aware or are not claiming the help they are entitled to, building relationships with private landlords through council run Central Suffolk Lettings so properties can be let at affordable rents to homeless households.

There are some plans to enable people in receipt of council tax reduction to be referred for reduced water tariffs.

It was also noted that a Food Network Coordinator would be appointed (Shared Prosperity Fund) to oversee food banks and all charity food outlets to ensure that all are known and are consistent in their governance of delivery.

*It was RESOLVED*

*To note phase 3 of the Cost-of-Living Action Plan and endorse the commitment to develop a longer-term approach to preventing poverty which seeks to understand the underlying drivers of poverty across both districts at a hyper local level through continued work with internal and external stakeholders and to include wider engagement with Town and Parish Councils.*

### **New raft of business grants**

The Rural England Prosperity Fund is providing a new round of funding to help productivity and strengthen the rural economy in rural communities. BDC was allocated £621,369 to use over the next two years.

Grants are available between £5000-10,000 per application and will fund a maximum of 50% of the total costs up to the maximum value of £10,000.

Eligible projects include net zero developments, agriculture and farm diversification, visitor economy business expansion as well as SME investment and diversification or investment in community facilities in our rural areas.

Businesses can check their eligibility before applying by emailing: -


[BMSDCEconomicdevelopment@baberghmidsuffolk.gov.uk](mailto:BMSDCEconomicdevelopment@baberghmidsuffolk.gov.uk)

More information on the grants can be found on The Heart of Suffolk Website and the Council Website



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## Free Business Support on offer for Babergh Start Ups

Babergh & Mid Suffolk councils have teamed up with MENTA to offer Startup Businesses free expert support and guidance.

As part of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund the councils were allocated £90,000 to deliver the scheme and have partnered with MENTA to roll it out across the districts.

It is open to those in Babergh that are thinking of starting a business, are in the process of starting a business or have recently started their business venture.

Find out more about this start up business support programme by visiting the Heart of Suffolk Website

Those that do not qualify for the above such as self-employed social enterprises can find other available support on the New Anglia Growth Hub website

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4 September 2023



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