

## District Council Report

### Babergh Budget

The council approved the budget for 24/25 at the February council meeting. Balancing the budget was not easy this year and was only possible with use of earmarked reserves along with increases in council tax, rents, and fees.

Council tax will go up by 2.99% which equates to a rise of 10p a week on a band D home. Council tenants will also see an increase of 7.7%. Social rents will increase by £7.92 a week and affordable rents will increase £11.13 a week.

Ongoing financial pressures remain a concern for the council with a possible budget gap of £6.7m in the coming years. With a possible income far short of this the council needs to look at all possible income and funding streams.

### Parking Charges

This week the council released proposals for Car Parking tariffs with tariff bands set out below –

Tariff Bands	Tariff Option A	
	Short Stay	Long Stay
Up to 1 hour	£1.00	n/a
Up to 2 hours	£1.50	£1.00
Up to 3 hours	£2.00	£1.50
Up to 4 hours	£2.50	£2.00
All Day	n/a	£2.50

The tariffs, along with the associated parking report, which Overview & Scrutiny (O&S) will discuss next week, follow on from the consultation on charging that ended on the 3<sup>rd</sup> March. The survey produced eighty-six responses in total with just under 50% of respondents expressing concerns that the introduction of charges will be detrimental to the towns, high street, shops, or businesses.

I asked why you get longer in the long stay car parking places for the same price as short stay and was advised that it is in order to encourage longer stays in the towns. I will take this up further next Monday when, as mentioned above, it comes to O&S before the report goes to cabinet.

### **Loft insulation for Suffolk homes.**

Funding is available to help Suffolk residents make their homes warmer and save money on their energy bills. Suffolk's Public Sector Leaders, which includes Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils, have launched a Suffolk Loft Insulation offer. Thanks to teaming up with builders' merchant Travis Perkins, Suffolk residents can get a significant reduction on loft insulation.

There are four product options available, and residents will receive a 50% discount off their purchase (up to £200), with free delivery.

### **Tax premiums for Empty & second homes.**

As discussed last month both councils agreed a new joint policy that will see the owners of properties left empty for a year or more paying double, with a premium of up to 100% from April 2024; properties empty for five years or more seeing their council tax bills treble with a premium of up to 200%; and owners of properties left empty for 10 years facing quadrupled bills, with a premium of up to 300%.

Owners of 576 second homes in Babergh will see their council tax bill double from April 2025.

The definition of a second home for council tax purposes would be a property which there is 'no one resident' but that is 'substantially furnished.' There will be exceptions, in line with Government policy, expected to include properties that are being actively marketed for sale or rent for a limited period, houses going through probate, caravan pitches or houseboat moorings.

Initial high-level analysis suggests the proposals for empty homes premiums could generate an extra £300k in Babergh, while the premiums for second homeowners in 2025 could net an additional £1.1m for Babergh.

### **Council of the year**

The iESE Public Sector Transformation Awards in London on Wednesday, 6 March named Babergh and Mid Suffolk councils, UK Council of the Year.

The award is presented to a council deemed 'outstanding' in transforming its services and creating vibrant communities. The councils received praise for their joint vision and innovation – achieving a number of UK firsts – and noted how, by working in collaboration with each other, with partners, and their communities, they continue to raise the bar for public services.

Among other things the councils have implemented pioneering environmental work to cut carbon emissions. These include being the first rural councils in the UK to start the switch from diesel to hydrotreated vegetable oil (HVO) to fuel its fleet of bin lorries. Installing solar panels on the roofs of Kingfisher Leisure Centre in Sudbury, Hadleigh Pool and Leisure, Mid Suffolk Leisure Centre and Stradbroke swimming pool and fitness centre. The councils were also among the first rural council to trial Solar covered parking bays, which have been installed at Kingfisher Leisure Centre and Mid Suffolk Leisure Centre.