Message from Councillor Nick Gowrley
Leader of Mid Suffolk District Council

Over the last 12 months we’ve been making sure your council tax is used to provide the services our communities need.

In 2018 we more than doubled our homelessness provision with the opening of The Foyer; a previously empty building that now offers temporary shelter to families and vulnerable people in need. We’ve also increased our provision of affordable housing, building new homes in Laxfield, Great Blakenham, Barking, Thurston, and Bramford.

But it hasn’t just been housing that’s seen investment in 2018: work is underway at the Regal Theatre in Stowmarket to expand this vital community facility and bring more visitors to our largest market town.

Meanwhile the Shop Front Grant Scheme is supporting small businesses in and around our market towns, and our Vision for Prosperity for Stowmarket – the result of a major consultation with residents, businesses and the third sector in Mid Suffolk – has brought all of our work in our largest town into a comprehensive five-year action plan, with town centre regeneration, investment in car parking and new housing all coming together.

We’ve transformed how we work: our staff are now settled in to a single, fit-for-purpose office while residents can find face-to-face access to our services in the heart of Stowmarket.

But the fact is 2019 is an important year for how your local services are funded: not only has our Revenue Support Grant fallen to zero from £2.3m in 2015/16, but the government is planning a Comprehensive Spending Review this year, which will shape all government spending for years to come.

We can’t predict what local government funding will look like by 2020, and uncertainty has been hitting every level of local government across the country, including here in Suffolk. Your council tax bill isn’t just about Mid Suffolk District Council: your money also goes to fund Suffolk County Council, Suffolk Constabulary and your local town or parish council. In fact, only approximately 10% of your council tax bill remains with us at Mid Suffolk District Council.

Each organisation has made decisions about council tax, and you can find messages from the leader of Suffolk County Council and the Police and Crime Commissioner overleaf. Here at Mid Suffolk, the uncertainty over funding has led us to ask you for a 2% rise in the Mid Suffolk portion of your bill: this amounts to 6p a week or £3.26 a year for a Band D property.

As we’re asking you for more money, it’s only right we tell you what we’re doing to ensure your money is well-spent.

For a start, we’ve been acting to reduce the impact of any further reductions in government funding, allowing us to keep this rise low at 2%. Over the last year we’ve changed how our council is structured to reduce costs without cutting services. We’ve also been making careful investments to provide an income to replace the reduced central government funding (over the next year we’re expecting an income of £600,000 from these investments – an outstanding return after just one year).

We’re also introducing a Business Rates Relief policy for small retailers: from April we’re offering discounts to small businesses including shops, cafes and restaurants, making life easier for the small businesses that are the backbone of our local economy.

Meanwhile young people leaving care, who are among the most vulnerable people in our communities, will now receive a council tax discount of up to 100%, supporting them through a difficult transition.

I’m proud that all this has been achieved without cutting the frontline services our residents depend upon.
Message from Cllr Matthew Hicks, Leader of Suffolk County Council

Each year we begin the budget setting process by looking at the pressures faced by local council services and how these may change in the future. Based on expected changes in population and other social effects including housing, employment and education, as community representatives, councillors reflect the views of local householders during these formative discussions. There are always tough calls to make as part of this process.

This year is the first for me as Leader of the Council and I am certainly drawing my thoughts from the many conversations, ideas, stories and concerns I have heard from residents.

I am proud to say that Suffolk remains in a stronger position due to the way we plan and manage our finances. This is testament to the experienced staff who work across all services. Unfortunately, I cannot shy away from the sheer scale of the financial challenges faced in local government. These are well documented, and we are increasingly feeling the same pressures in Suffolk.

There is an increasing demand in statutory services for adult care as well as looked after children. Our adult and children’s services now account for around 75% of Suffolk County Council’s total budget so every other service must find ways to adapt as they draw from an increasingly smaller pot of what’s left in the remaining 25% of budget. Whilst not everyone may be directly touched by some of these services, I’m sure you will agree that supporting our most vulnerable residents should be of the highest priority.

I am pleased to confirm that we will be spending more on these services this year, increasing our council budget by over 3% to £519 million. In part, this rise has been made possible by a better-than-expected central Government grant, but the reality is that we do need to increase basic Council tax by 2.99% and apply a 1% Social Care precept, specifically for supporting adult care services.

Find out more at: www.suffolk.gov.uk/counciltax

Message from Tim Passmore, Police & Crime Commissioner for Suffolk

A major part of my role as Suffolk’s Police and Crime Commissioner is to distribute the policing grants from government and set the policing part of your council tax. This means I am responsible for setting the budget, which includes how much you will be asked to pay through your council tax for policing our county, and deciding how it should be spent.

Policing Minister, Nick Hurd gave PCCs the ability to raise the policing element of the precept by up to £24 per annum for a Band D property. This put me in a very difficult position, but I felt I had no choice but to impose the maximum increase because without it, the policing capability across the county would be compromised.

This precept increase adds an extra £6.5m to the policing budget for 2019/20. The £2 a month precept increase (for a Band D property) will allow the Chief Constable to:

- Recruit an additional 29 police officers to be deployed in front-line policing in Suffolk
- Recruit an additional 24 Suffolk police staff investigators
- Recruit an additional 45 police staff which are shared with Norfolk
- Increase investment in new technology and equipment to deal with modern-day challenges in the county

The Chief Constable has presented his plan for the next financial year and has assured me that the two major concerns - the increase in violent and drug-related crime and improved visibility - will be addressed. This proposal will see eight new police officers in our county town and a targeted squad of 21 officers to fight drugs and serious violence which will operate across the county.

The £24 per annum increase will raise £6.5m through the policing element of your council tax, along with the additional home office grant of £1.3m and a one-off grant of £1.2m to help fund the increase in the employers’ contributions to the police pension scheme. In all, the policing budget will be increased by £9.2m.

Once we have accounted for unavoidable cost pressures and added the savings made throughout the year, this will give us a total of £4.8m extra for the policing budget for the next financial year. Full detail of how this is accounted for is available on our website www.suffolk-pcc.gov.uk.

Each year I have a programme of public engagement events to hear at first-hand the issues that concern you. Details of these events are available on our website.

Find out more at: www.suffolk-pcc.gov.uk