District Council Report 2015

The end of the 4 year term comes next week - quite a lot has happened over those 4 years.

It was in June 2011 the referendum took place as to whether to fully merge with Mid Suffolk District Council. The decision was to remain as two sovereign Councils and agreement was made towards an integrated work force.

By March 2012 a single Chief Exec was appointed and Director posts filled and in July saw the joint corporate managers in place resulting in a 40% reduction in the size of the team. Over the next 2 years many member led meetings were held looking at housing, economy, communities, environment and corporate activity focusing on developing outcomes to go forward to writing the approving the Joint Strategic Plan 2014/19 identifying outcomes, how we will work and what success would look like.

The new Council will be looking to successfully deliver the identified visions and priorities, such as working with communities, improving our planning performance including the time taken to process applications – delivering a new model for customer access and operational delivery and maximizing income the can be generated.

With the implementation of a joint work force, we have seen a 37% reduction in overall management. Operational delivery Teams were formed under a new set of terms and conditions of employment. The whole project has generated annual savings of £1.6m across the two Councils.

One area where investment has been made is in the provision of Solar Panels on the roofs of 2150 houses across the districts. This
will result in around £7.5m of new income over the next 20 years in addition to cheaper electricity for the tenants.

Over the past 4 years almost 1000 new homes have been built of which just over 300 were delivered as affordable.

As you are all aware Housing is a priority for the new Government. Local Councils are also making this a priority as funding is given for all new housing coming onto the market. As the general grants are decreasing Government have introduced payments for performance and delivery. Rules on planning have been relaxed in some areas as we have seen from the Taylor Wimpey application in Holbrook. The way the new Core Strategy policies have been written makes it very difficult to oppose development.

Following the recent elections, we have a new Council with approx half the members being replaced. It was disappointing to lose so many valued and experienced members. For the first time in its history, Babergh has a controlling party and it will be very interesting how this works in the future. I already understand that the Chairs and vice chairs will all be Conservative held. We have the Annual meeting of Babergh tomorrow when more will be learnt. The current set up is 31 Conservative, 8 Independent, 3 Liberal Democrat and 1 Labour member.

Finally, as you are probably aware, the Council decided not to increase Council Tax for the third year running. This was due to the considerable savings that have been made and a decision to use the Governments New Homes Bonus and Business Rate grant. At this moment in time no anticipated changes in service levels are expected but as always we will need to consider how we meet the financial challenges in the future.