

BABERGH DISTRICT COUNCIL

FROM: Strategic and Financial
Planning Task Group

REPORT NUMBER: **J118**

TO: COUNCIL

DATE OF MEETING: 20 October 2009

STATE OF THE DISTRICT DEBATE

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The Council holds an annual State of the District Debate as part of its policy and budget making framework. The issues and outcomes identified in the course of the debate are considered and developed further by the Strategic and Financial Planning Task Group as part of the strategic and financial planning process.

2. RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 That the issues and outcomes identified in the course of the debate be considered and developed further by the Strategic and Financial Planning Task Group as part of the 2010/11 strategic and financial planning process.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 The Council has a £1.4m savings and efficiencies requirement for 2010/11. This is a very significant amount in relation to the Council's budget, representing 12.5% of the Council's current net General Fund Revenue Expenditure. It is highly likely that the required savings for 2010/11 will require some fundamental changes that will make an appreciable impact on service delivery and staff numbers and/or terms and conditions.
- 3.2 The Council is therefore facing a huge challenge and the debate needs to take into account the significant budgetary pressures faced by this Council and across local government for 2010/11 onwards. This stricture has the potential to limit options for new developmental work and the delivery of existing services.
- 3.3 Financial implications will be considered as part of the ongoing strategic and financial planning process.

4. RISK MANAGEMENT

- 4.1 This report is most closely linked with the Council's Significant Business Risk No. 4: political and managerial leadership, and No. 10: local response to national issues. Key risks are set out below:

Risk Description	Likelihood	Seriousness or Impact	Mitigation Measures
There are serious challenges facing the Council and its communities that require strong political and managerial leadership. These challenges must be identified, actions determined to deal with these and resources allocated. All of this has to be done in an environment of significant budgetary pressures	Significant	Critical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consultation and research to identify the challenges • The State of the District Debate to agree the challenges • A comprehensive strategic and financial planning process that prioritises and allocates resources to the challenges • Medium Term Action Plans that set out the actions, targets and outcomes to deal with the challenges
The Council does not sufficiently consider the impact of the economic downturn or does not take appropriate actions	Low	Critical	

5. **KEY INFORMATION**

Background

- 5.1 In 2007/08 the Council developed a ten year Strategic Plan to run from 2008. This set out the issues facing its stakeholders and area and allowed the Council to develop priorities, outcomes and actions to deal with these.
- 5.2 The Plan was developed following extensive district-wide consultation, analysis of demographic information and performance data, and the involvement of a number of focus groups that encompassed Babergh's diverse communities.
- 5.3 The following key themes emerged from this process and formed the basis for the Council's corporate priorities:
- A greener and cleaner Babergh
 - Quality homes local people can afford
 - A safer and healthier Babergh
 - A strong and sustainable community
 - Vibrant places and communities.
- 5.4 A total of 28 outcomes were identified under these priorities.
- 5.5 The plan also recognised that the Council had several roles including: direct provider of services, partnership worker, influencer and community leader. This was important in developing the outcomes and determining which of these linked into the Suffolk Community Strategy and the Strategic Partnership Plans.

- 5.6 At last year's debate, Members focused on the likely consequences for Babergh of an economic downturn and the levers they felt the Council had to help address these consequences.
- 5.7 The debate focused on three drivers:
- The economic recession
 - Housing markets including the effect on affordable housing
 - Other price rises including transport related, heating fuels and food.
- 5.8 As a consequence of this, the following areas were identified as requiring a higher profile in the outcomes:
- Debt advice – especially through the CAB
 - Protecting the vulnerable – especially benefits claimants and those that could be affected through fuel poverty
 - Community safety – crime levels
 - Employment – across the whole business spectrum: vulnerable large organisations, the self employed and small businesses.

Consultation and research

- 5.9 A large amount of consultation and research activity has been undertaken to support the strategic and financial planning process. The key findings are set out below:
- 5.10 Through the “**Suffolk Speaks**” consultation partnership of local authorities and the Suffolk Police Authority the Council commissioned research to inform the budget setting process for 2010/11. This project consisted of work with focus groups to review and rank strategic priorities and outcomes in the context of the current economic recession and financial environment for the public sector.
- 5.11 The research identified that there was general satisfaction in terms of the service areas encompassed by the priorities, but participants indicated a desire to see budget allocations redressed. Indeed, the general consensus was that significant increases were required with regard to ‘A strong and sustainable Babergh economy’ and ‘Quality homes that local people can afford’ at the expense of ‘A cleaner and greener Babergh’, ‘A safer and healthier Babergh’ and ‘Vibrant places and strong communities’.
- 5.12 In terms of outcomes, prioritisation was generally more simplistic. It was clear from the discussions that participants value those services that are most tangible at a local level. Findings suggest that priority is given to services that are seen to have a directly beneficial (and visible) impact on everyday lives.
- 5.13 There is little doubt that this partially relates to the current economic climate. This was borne out by a perceived need for increased expenditure on economic development.
- 5.14 Certain outcomes were seen as low priority, such as the tackling of climate change. Others such as the outcomes relating to less crime and improved access to health services were felt to be of value, but the responsibility of other organisations. Babergh's need to contribute was questioned and the Council was advised to spend its budget elsewhere.

5.15 Whilst these findings indicate that there is a requirement for greater levels of information to ensure residents understand service delivery across the public sector in Suffolk, fulfilling their expectations will be achieved by focussing on those services that have greatest impact on their everyday lives.

5.16 The key messages that can be taken from the results are:

- The economic downturn caused participants to ask for expenditure on directly tangible services.
- A strong local economy is seen as the backbone of service provision, with recognition that the vibrancy of the economy has a direct impact on revenue available for other services.
- Affordable housing remains a key priority across all age groups and in both urban and rural communities.
- There is little desire for Babergh to be seen to deliver services that are perceived to be the domain of other organisations (in relation to health and crime in particular).
- Confusion with regard to service delivery points to a requirement for more information to residents so they are able to understand the Council's community leadership role.

5.17 The **Place Survey** consultation results provide a range of research data that focus on customer satisfaction for specific services and the way the Council runs things as a whole (e.g. Value for Money).

5.18 For the 'overall satisfaction with the Council' measure, 52% of residents are satisfied with the way the Council runs things. Babergh has the second highest score of the Suffolk districts. The result is also significantly better than the overall Suffolk (46%), East of England (47%) and England (45%) figures.

5.19 For the measure 'perception of Value for Money', Babergh has the highest score of the Suffolk districts, with 37% of residents thinking that Babergh provides value for money. Whilst this is quite a low percentage, Babergh has the highest score of the Suffolk districts. The result is also better than the overall Suffolk (34%), East of England (35%) and England (33%) figures.

5.20 67% of residents feel that they belong to their local neighbourhood. Babergh has the second highest score of the Suffolk districts and this result is also significantly better than the overall Suffolk (62%), East of England (59%) and England (59%) figures. This is a Suffolk LAA2 indicator and provides evidence of the relative strength of local communities.

5.21 Babergh is ranked joint first (92%) in the Suffolk districts (ranking shared with Mid Suffolk) for the measure of people aged 65 and over who are satisfied with their home and neighbourhood. This result is better than the overall Suffolk (89%), East of England (87%) and England (84%) figures. This measure provides useful contextual information for the Council's work on the 'age' theme of the Equality Framework for Local Government.

- 5.22 Only 13% are aware of the civil protection arrangements in the local area. Babergh has the second lowest score of the Suffolk districts. The result is also lower than the overall Suffolk (16%), East of England (15%) and England (15%) figures. This is a development area for all local authorities in Suffolk and should be addressed in partnership with the Joint Emergency Planning Unit.
- 5.23 Looking at satisfaction measures for particular services:
- 5.24 61% are satisfied with Council services to keep public land clear of litter and refuse. Babergh has the second lowest score of the Suffolk districts.
- 5.25 73% are satisfied with the Council's refuse collection service. Babergh has the lowest satisfaction score of the Suffolk districts. The result is also lower than the overall Suffolk, East of England and All England figures.
- 5.26 65% are satisfied with the Council's doorstep recycling service. Babergh has the second lowest satisfaction score of the Suffolk districts. The result is also lower than the overall Suffolk, East of England and All England figures.
- 5.27 38% are satisfied with sport and leisure facilities provided or supported by the Council. Babergh has the lowest satisfaction score of the Suffolk districts. Babergh has the highest level of adult participation in sport. 29% of our population participate in at least 30 minutes of sport and active recreation or sport of at least moderate intensity on at least 3 days a week.
- 5.28 69% are satisfied with parks and open spaces provided or supported by the Council. Babergh has the fourth highest satisfaction score of the Suffolk districts.
- 5.29 Reviewing the results of these satisfaction measures provides the Council with a broad assessment of particular aspects of service provision and points to a need for the Council to review its performance in particular areas and/or review how its achievements are brought to the attention of service users.
- 5.30 The Place Survey also included two perception measures where a range of quality of life measures was ranked for importance for making the area a good place to live and secondly by which areas required the most improvement in Babergh. The key results are listed in the following table.

Making Babergh a good place to live		Areas for improvement	
The level of crime	59 %	Activities for teenagers	50%
Health Services	51%	Public transport	32%
Access to nature	36%	Affordable decent Housing	31%
Affordable decent Housing	34%	Level of traffic congestion	27%
Education Provision	34%	Roads and pavement repairs	26%
Public transport	33%	Shopping facilities	20%
Clean streets	32%	Sports and leisure facilities	20%
Shopping facilities	31%	Wage levels and cost of living	20%
Level of traffic congestion	23%	Health services	19%
Parks and open spaces	22%	Facilities for young children	19%
Activities for teenagers	20%	Clean streets	14%

- 5.31 This table highlights a significant variance between those quality of life measures which provide the “ideal” environment or society and the specific areas of concern where there is a real or perceived need for improvement in the range and scale of public services or social economic infrastructure in Babergh.
- 5.32 The Audit Commission report, “**When it comes to the credit crunch**” provided a model that describes the stages of a significant economic recession. These are:
- Wave 1 Economic: A relatively short period of economic decline, followed by unemployment and falling incomes.
 - Wave 2 Social: Longer period when output stabilises however unemployment rises with consequent impact on Housing and social order.
 - Wave 3 Unequal recovery: Economy recovering, unemployment starts to decline, differing localised recovery prognosis.
- 5.33 The report concludes that the impact from each wave may not be completely discreet and that the local context will effect the severity of the outcomes in each area a (i.e. the strength of the local economy etc).
- 5.34 The research for the report was carried out in the second quarter of 2009 when the short term economic impacts were being generated. Looking forward to 2010/11 onwards it is likely that Babergh residents will be impacted by the characteristics of wave 2. This could mean the following:
- Business failures
 - Rising unemployment
 - Increased debt and payment issues for residents
 - House repossessions and homelessness
 - Rising social costs (crime/health).
- 5.35 Babergh District Council was a key partner in the development of a Suffolk wide approach to support local communities through the current economic recession. The ‘Tackling the Economic Downturn Summit’ developed 43 ideas and made 10 commitments.
- 5.36 Some specific initiatives from this work include redirecting additional resources to the affordable housing programme and the establishment of the private sector leasing scheme to encourage more people to become landlords. In addition, through the Homelessness Strategy there was increased work to support residents with mortgage repayment problems. There was also support for the business community through the provision of affordable offices in Hadleigh and Sudbury, and the loan scheme for start up businesses.
- 5.37 The **Eastern Region Public Health Observatory** produces an annual snapshot of health in the district. The main findings are that:
- The health of people in Babergh is generally better than the England average.
 - Despite overall good health there are inequalities within Babergh by gender, location and deprivation.
 - One in 10 children in reception class are obese, more than 1 in 5 adults smoke and one adult in 7 is a binge drinker (more than 1350 people are admitted to hospital due to alcohol related harm each year).
 - Priorities for the area should be to improve physical activity and healthy eating for children and adults.

5.38 The **Commission for Rural Communities** annual report highlights a number of key factors that impact on the rural communities, which predominate in Babergh. Salient factors for the Babergh area include:

- The population of rural England continues to rise at a faster rate than in the country as a whole.
- People continue to leave Suffolk at around age 20. This leaves a relatively small proportion of people aged 20 to 35 but correspondingly more people aged over 60 in the age profile.
- The median age for residents is nearly six years older than in urban areas.
- Rural residents travel greater distances and more of the travel is by car.
- Housing affordability remains a major issue in rural areas, especially for lower quartile incomes.
- The proportion of the population with no or low qualifications is higher than average and relates closely to economic performance. There are more low paid jobs than average.
- Fuel poverty is more common in sparse areas.
- Levels of people with a disability are higher in rural areas. This may link to the older population profile.
- Demand for new development is significantly higher in rural areas than urban areas, and the countryside has seen a greater number of houses built in it than the urban fringe in recent years.

5.39 The **British Crime Survey** revealed that Suffolk is now ranked the 9th safest county in the country, slipping from the 6th spot last year. However it remains one of the safest places to live in the country and crime fell by 4% in the last year. Suffolk is the second safest county in the East of England, behind Norfolk.

5.40 Crime has fallen from 48,330 recorded offences in 2007/08 to 46,504 in the last 12 months. Vehicle crime, criminal damage, including arson and burglary offences all fell by at least 6%. Violent crime levels remained the same.

5.41 The only areas where crime grew were robbery, which increased by 3%, and drug offences by 12%. It is claimed that the drug offences figure rose due to a pro-active approach to drug enforcement. Suffolk Constabulary has highlighted the importance of community policing in driving down crime levels.

5.42 The Council has taken part in an **equality mapping exercise** that suggests that the elderly are emerging as a clear priority. For Suffolk there is expected to be a 49% growth in the over 65s by 2021 and 90% in the over 85s. The mid-2007 population estimates for Babergh confirm this trend. This implies a significant rise in demand for all age related public services and support.

5.43 The Council needs to ensure that as people grow older they have opportunities for making a positive contribution through employment, learning, leisure and activities, and that they have the ability to engage with and participate in decisions that will impact on their lives. Secondly, older people need to have the support to live as independently as possible for as long as they can, but have the support of appropriate services to respond to their individual needs.

5.44 The Fairness and Equal Access Plan will include actions that focus upon the changing age profile of the Babergh district and will seek to address this in developing its one-year service delivery plan for 2010/11. In developing actions it will be vital for the Council to work with its partners on delivery and through the Local Strategic Partnerships.

Analysing the information

5.45 In analysing the data from the range of public consultation and strategic environmental data sources a table has been devised (Appendix 1) of the results from each source against the 28 outcomes in the Strategic Plan. Each of the sources has been used to rank the outcomes on a high, medium or low importance basis.

5.46 This analysis identifies that each of the five strategic priorities provides a vital contribution to supporting Babergh communities particularly in the context of the current economic recession. There is not a strong case for amending the top line priorities and the review does not identify any significant gaps.

5.47 The importance of the core council functions in delivering a housing /homelessness service, effective benefits and advice services, economic support and advice for businesses, and community support through enforcement and community safety are highlighted.

5.48 There is however highlighted a potential conflict between some of the differing information sources with regard to the relative importance of individual priority outcomes. In addition some of the models used are rather one dimensional in rating all of the individual outcomes underpinning each key corporate priority.

5.49 As an example the longer term impact of actions around climate change and recycling along with issues such as preparedness to meet emergency situations are not rated as important. These views and subsequent ranking must be considered in the context of the strategic community leadership role that Babergh District Council has in Suffolk, and central government's national agenda and targets.

Conclusions

5.50 This debate needs to take into account the significant budgetary pressures faced by this Council and across local government for 2010/11 onwards. This stricture has the potential to limit options for new developmental work and the delivery of existing services.

5.51 A key factor to consider is the developmental stage of the current economic recession in the Babergh area. All of the evidence from activity statistics around benefit claimants and other complementary measures support the supposition that the impact of the recession in 2010/11 will be focused on the wider community. This will be evidenced through the fall out from a period of zero economic growth and the longer term impacts of long term unemployment. Consequently this should provide the focus for actions and initiatives to support local communities and attempt to mitigate the impacts of the recession.

- 5.52 This suggests that those areas identified through the 2008 debate as requiring a higher profile in the outcomes remain:
- Debt advice – especially through the CAB
 - Protecting the vulnerable – especially benefits claimants and those that could be affected through fuel poverty
 - Community safety – crime levels
 - Employment – across the whole business spectrum: vulnerable large organisations, the self employed and small businesses.
- 5.53 The research also highlights the importance of at least maintaining or preferably continuing to improve the Council's core services such as waste management, street cleansing and housing. Especially important to the Babergh area is the provision of housing and, to those on the lowest income, affordable housing.
- 5.54 The outcomes also need to consider Babergh's ageing population profile and ensure that services are provided that are suitable and accessible.
- 5.55 Partnership work also needs to continue to support Babergh communities with regard to improving skill and educational attainment base levels.
- 5.56 The conclusions from this debate will be used to inform the work of the Strategic and Financial Planning Task Group in developing the 2010/11 strategic and financial planning process.
- 5.57 This work will be supplemented by the current detailed review of the Medium Term Plans 2010-2013 and the monitoring process of the One Year Delivery Plan for 2009/10. This will measure achievement and progress against the outcomes in the Strategic Plan and provide an indication of any further requirements to modify or amend actions and outcomes.

7 **APPENDICES**

- (1) Findings of the consultation and strategic environmental data sources mapped against Strategic Plan outcomes.

8 **BACKGROUND PAPERS REFERRED TO:**

- (1) Strategic Plan for Babergh 2008-2018
- (2) Suffolk Speaks Partnership: Budget setting focus groups.
- (3) Place Survey
- (4) Audit Commission: When it comes to the crunch
- (5) Eastern Region Public Health Observatory: Local Authority Health Profiles
- (6) Commission for Rural Communities: State of the countryside report:
- (7) British Crime Survey
- (8) Suffolk Observatory: Babergh profile

CONTACT: Peter Quirk

EMAIL: peter.quirk@babergh.gov.uk

FINDINGS OF THE CONSULTATION AND STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTAL DATA SOURCES MAPPED TO STRATEGIC PLAN OUTCOMES

Objective	Budget setting focus groups	Place survey	Credit crunch impact	Rural issues	Health perspective	British crime Survey
Quality homes that local people can afford						
1. There are enough good quality homes which meet high environmental and sustainability standards to meet the needs of the people of Babergh	Medium	Medium	Medium	High	Medium	
2. There are enough affordable homes to meet the needs of the people of Babergh.	High	High	High	High	Medium	
3. New housing developments are supported by adequate infrastructure improvements.	Medium	Medium		High		
4. Fewer people are homeless.	Medium	High	High	Medium	Medium	
A greener and cleaner Babergh						
5. The right balance between protecting the natural environment and supporting development opportunities for the area and its people.	Low	Low		High	Low	
6. A smaller carbon footprint for the area.	Low	Low		Low	Low	
7. Babergh's environment is clean, with little environmental vandalism such as fly tipping and is recognised as such by residents.	Low	High		Medium		Medium
8. Less waste to landfill.	Medium	Medium		Medium		
9. Better traffic management, air quality, improved road infrastructure and more effective public transport.	Low	High		High		
A safer and healthier Babergh						
10. People living, working and visiting Babergh are safer and feel safer from crime and its effect	Medium	Medium	High			High
11. A more active population with healthier lifestyles	Low	Medium	Low	Medium	High	

Objective	Budget setting focus groups	Place survey	Credit crunch impact	Rural issues	Health perspective	British crime Survey
12. Improved health and life expectancy for residents, particularly in the most income-deprived areas, with reduced levels of cancer, coronary heart disease and obesity	Low	Medium	Low	Low	High	
13. Access to public health care services	Medium	Medium	Medium	High	High	
14. Reduced levels of teenage pregnancies where they currently exceed the national average	Low	Low	Low	Low	Medium	
15. It is safer to travel on Babergh's roads	Low	Medium		Medium	Medium	Medium
16. The area is ready to respond effectively to emergency situations arising from environmental or other causes	Low	Low		Low		Medium
A strong and sustainable Babergh economy						
17. Babergh's economy has grown sustainably, with more small and medium sized enterprises situated here	High	Medium	High	Medium	Low	
18. Increased local educational opportunities and improved attainment and skill levels among Babergh's children, young people and working population – particularly in the more income deprived areas	High	Low	High	Medium	Medium	Low
19. More skilled and higher paid jobs in the Babergh area with a higher proportion being taken up by Babergh residents	Medium	Medium	High	High	Low	Low
20. Improved infrastructure in our market towns to increase vitality and viability	Medium	Low	Medium	Medium		
Vibrant places and strong communities						
21. Reduce impact of rural isolation, particularly limited access to affordable housing, transport and jobs	Medium	High	High	High	Medium	
22. Active villages and communities	Low	High	Medium	High	High	Low

Objective	Budget setting focus groups	Place survey	Credit crunch impact	Rural issues	Health perspective	British crime Survey
23. Increased take up of developmental opportunities and activities by children and young people, particularly from isolated or income deprived areas	High	High	Medium	High	High	Medium
24. People have effective and convenient access to the public services they need by physical, telecommunications or other electronic means	Medium	High	Medium	High	Medium	
25. Public services appropriately reflect the needs, aspirations and choices of individuals from different groups, such as older people, in their design, resourcing and delivery	Low	Medium		Medium	Medium	
26. Individuals have a sense of belonging within cohesive communities where everyone is valued	Low	Low		Medium		High
27. Vulnerable people are supported to live in the community	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium	High	Medium
28. More people are involved in local decision making and participate in democratic processes which appropriately reflect the diversity of local communities	Low	Low		Medium		