

District Cllr Peter Patrick's Report - Shotley Parish Council meeting of 19.10.2017

The following points may be of interest to the PC.

1. The negotiations with our staff over the move to Endeavour House (EH) appear now to have been completed satisfactorily and the formal move from the two previous offices will take place imminently. Some meetings have already been held at EH, and some keen staff have already started working there.

The two formal Public Access Points envisaged in the resolutions passed by the two Councils last September (2016), at Sudbury and Stowmarket, are open for business and I'm looking forward to the arrival at the end of this month of the new Assistant Director responsible for Public Access. She will need to ensure, inter alia, that all parts of the district can feel properly served.

2. You will doubtless hear that the Cabinets of the two Authorities who already work so closely together agreed last week to initiate moves which might lead to the winding up of Babergh and Mid Suffolk so that a single new Authority covering their area and population can be established, hopefully in time for the elections in 2019.

There are good organisational and strategic reasons for this move. As you might expect, my major concern is finance, and I foresee the new arrangement as the only way out of Babergh's difficult financial position. This weakness has been clear for the past few years, and there is no alternative way out that I can see. Central Government funding has become much tighter since 2011, when a referendum was held, and Babergh has failed dismally to attract sufficient new homes to provide the alternative New Homes Bonus. This is a fact of life. Our opponents will make much of 'democratic deficit', but I've not heard anybody suggest how else to improve Babergh's position.

We are, in fact, starting on a major new investment in Sudbury, but capital will need to be borrowed and the pay-back will not happen for a couple of years. In the meantime, our 'current account' funds are rapidly diminishing as we attempt to maintain our services. Mid Suffolk has significantly more 'current account' funds than Babergh, and much healthier income streams.

I am a member of the Cabinet and aware of the responsibility that rests on our shoulders. We would be thoroughly irresponsible if we allowed ourselves to be swayed by our political opponents whose principal purpose, not surprisingly, is to make mischief.

Peter Patrick
District Councillor