

SUFFOLK COUNTY COUNCILLOR'S REPORT – JANUARY 2023



Cllr Stephen Burroughes - Framlingham Division

• **KEEPING SUFFOLK WARM DURING WINTER**

“Suffolk Winter Warmth” provides items such as hats, gloves, scarves, blankets, duvets, baby sleep bags, hot water bottles, LED bulbs, draughtproofing and more, to households in need. Following a successful pilot in November, Suffolk Winter Warmth launched this week. The project provides support for any household experiencing hardship and in need of support to prevent ill health and keep warm. Residents can be referred by professional or voluntary sector organisations supporting residents who are struggling to heat their homes. These organisations include: District and Borough Councils, Health Professionals, Citizens Advice and Community Groups, Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service, Rural Coffee Caravan and more.

The project is backed by £50,000 of funding from Suffolk’s Collaborative Communities Board and is co-ordinated on behalf of the whole county by East Suffolk Council. Professional and voluntary organisations can refer residents to the scheme by visiting: [Winter warmth referral » East Suffolk Council](#).

There are also more than 250 voluntary warm spaces across Suffolk, where residents can meet up with members of the community in a warm, safe space, at no charge. A map of warm spaces in Suffolk can be found on the Rural Coffee Caravan website: <https://ruralcoffeecaravan.org.uk/map/> Alongside this, all Suffolk Libraries will act as warm, safe spaces this winter. Information and opening times for Suffolk Libraries can be found at <https://www.suffolklibraries.co.uk/>

Further details of cost of living support available for Suffolk residents and organisations can be found at www.suffolk.gov.uk/costofliving

• **SOLAR FARM PROPOSAL “NOT ANYWHERE NEAR ACCEPTABLE”**

Councillor Richard Rout, the council’s deputy leader, told the Planning Inspectorate’s Examination Authority panel that it is “the poorest application I have dealt with to date.” Councillor Rout made these comments at the first hearing of the formal Examination process (Tuesday 6 December 2022) which hears representations from all interested parties of the proposal. This process concludes on 28 March 2023, during which time more sessions will be held when the council will address its concerns in greater detail.

The council has many issues with the current application, including:

- The geographic scale of the proposal which will permanently transform the landscape
- The impact on local communities of the 24 month construction period
- Sunnica’s serious shortcomings in terms of both evidence and methodology
- Sunnica’s presentation of proposal which makes it, and impacts on local communities, unclear
- Mitigation proposals do not appear to be tailored to the local context

The Examining Authority began their process in September, which is will conclude on 28 March 2023. A report and recommendation will then be sent to Secretary of State, who is expected to make the final decision whether to approve the project or not, later in 2023.

• **HISTORIC DEAL HANDS SUFFOLK REGENERATION AND SKILLS POWERS TO LEVEL UP.**

Suffolk will be devolved power over their Adult Education budget, so they can shape provision in a way that best suits the needs of the local community and will receive immediate support to build new affordable homes on brownfield sites, as well as more capital funding to improve energy efficiency in houses. The deal will also see SCC handed control over a £480 million investment fund – this will be guaranteed for the next thirty years. This will enable the county to drive growth and plan for the long-term with certainty.

Suffolk will also get a directly elected leader of the council. This not only provides a single person who is accountable to the people of Suffolk but gives the county a local champion who can fight our corner.

The Levelling Up Secretary attended a ceremony in Bury St Edmunds with Cllr Matthew Hicks to officially sign the deal. Michael Gove also visited Norfolk to sign a devolution agreement with Norfolk County Council, which will transfer further money and power out of Whitehall. The deals follow Cornwall Council who recently signed their own devolution deal with the government, unlocking powers and long-term funding of £360 million.

With three new devolution deals signed recently, 50% of England will now be covered by a devolution deal and reaffirms the government's commitment in the Levelling Up White Paper to offer a devolution 2030.

The deal also sets out the government's plans to devolve more power to Suffolk County Council through:

- **Investment:** It will bring decades of funding worth £480 million to improve the lives of Suffolk's residents and spend on their local priorities.
- **Housing:** The deal will provide £5.8 million to regenerate brownfield land into beautiful, affordable homes and drive economic growth across the area; Suffolk will also receive greater compulsory purchase powers.
- **Education:** The agreement devolves the Adult Education Budget so they can shape provision in a way that best suits the needs of residents and the local Suffolk economy.
- **Transport:** An integrated transport settlement starting in 2024/25, to support the area to improve key transport infrastructure priorities.
- **The Environment:** The new deal will help Suffolk deliver on its ambitions to be the country's greenest county with £3 million to improve energy efficiency in homes.

• **WARNING AFTER CHILDREN SEEN PLAYING ON FROZEN POND**

The advice comes after a tragic incident on Sunday, 11 December, in which four young boys died after falling into an icy lake at Babbs Mill Park near Solihull. Since then, Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service has increased patrols at ponds, lakes, and reservoirs across the county to help highlight how dangerous icy water can be.

Despite recent safety messages from the service, firefighters have still seen children playing on a frozen pond at a park in Lowestoft, with members of the public reporting that they had also witnessed children testing the ice near the water's edge. An inspection of the pond revealed that the ice is only a few centimetres thick and liable to break at any moment. Further advice on winter water safety, including what to do if you fall through the ice, is available at www.rlss.org.uk/winter-water-safety.

• **RECORD NUMBER OF RESIDENTS HELP SHAPE COUNTY COUNCIL BUDGET**

Each year, councils everywhere engage with their residents about how much money they plan to spend on public services, in order to set their annual budget. Suffolk County Council is no different with a budget that funds services from gritting roads during the winter, to providing Family Hubs and keeping the most vulnerable people safe and well. The budget for Suffolk County Council services in 2022/23 is £625 million.

Between early October and the start of December, the county council collected a total of 2,617 responses. From this feedback which was made up of a wide range of individuals, it saw that social care for both adults and children were the two top areas where people feel the council should be spending more, with mental health services the next most important area. Just behind these areas, residents want more to be spent on the county's roads and pavements and local bus services.

Within the feedback the county has seen a majority support for an increase in council tax with 48.6% stating that council tax should increase, compared with 31.8% who oppose an increase. Similarly, when asked about the specific increase in funding for adult social care, 51.7% supported an increase compared with 18.9% opposing this increase. Due to the number of residents taking part in this survey, there was a good

representative view from across Suffolk, recognising that a small increase in council tax could allow the county council to continue providing the right level of service to its residents.

Newly launched focus groups also helped form part of the county council's engagement with residents, community groups and other key local representatives. This gave the county council the opportunity to discuss the pressures it faces and understand the challenges that those in Suffolk's communities are facing.

A budget proposal is now being developed with many factors in mind, such as ensuring the right level of funding is available to deliver statutory services and political priorities but also giving due consideration to the feedback received from the budget survey. The proposals will first be considered by Suffolk County Council's Scrutiny Committee in January 2023, before being debated, and voted upon, by all Suffolk County Councillors in February 2023.

- **SUFFOLK COUNTY COUNCIL BECOMES A DISABILITY CONFIDENT LEADER**

This achievement recognises the progress the council has made to make both its recruitment processes and working environment more inclusive for disabled people, and follows the council attaining Disability Confident Employer status in 2017. Being a Disability Confident organisation means the council plays a leading role in changing attitudes, behaviour and cultures, both within the organisation, and wider, through its networks and communities. Becoming a Disability Confident Leader means that the County Council will also act as a champion in supporting other businesses in the area to become Disability Confident.

According to data from the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP), more than 4.7 million disabled people are in work, and yet disabled people are almost twice as likely to be unemployed as non-disabled people, and three times as likely to be economically inactive. The employment rate of disabled people is estimated to be 53%, compared to 82% of non-disabled people.

There are also many people in employment who don't share their disability with their employer or who aren't yet aware of it themselves. Over 80% of disabilities are invisible, In Suffolk County Council, 61% of staff have declared their status, the council aims to increase this number with the measures it has put in place in becoming a Disability Confident Leader.

- **COUNCIL TO PROTECT FRONTLINE SERVICES AND INCREASE FUNDING IN BUDGET PROPOSAL**

Adult care services and children's services will receive £47m more funding as part of Suffolk County Council's £685m budget proposals recently published. Despite an incredibly challenging economic climate, the council has been able to produce a balanced budget. This will protect the services that people rely on the most and continue to care for the most vulnerable, which accounts for 75% of the whole budget. Adult care services will have £34m more in their budget, and children's services will have a further £13m. This will help with the extra expense needed to meet the huge increase in demands for services, as well as higher costs due to inflation.

The budget-setting has been achieved with input from the council's partners, officers, departments and notably, Suffolk residents. Over 2,600 local people contributed to an online survey and focus groups, asking where they would spend more money, spend less money, and their views on Council Tax. The top service areas where people wanted to spend more, were social care services for adults and children.

For further information from my report or questions please contact me at:

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