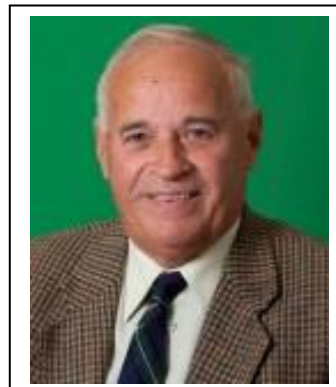


Parish Report July 2019

Councillor

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New leadership team for LDGI Group

My political group at Suffolk County Council, made up of Liberal Democrat, Green and Independent (LDGI) councillors, has elected a new leadership team for 2019/20. The group will be led by Cllr Penny Otton (Liberal Democrat), with Cllr Elfrede Brambley-Crawshaw (Green) as deputy leader.

New "task and finish" groups to scrutinise education

Suffolk County Council has pledged to set up "task and finish" groups to scrutinise education issues, such as home-to-school transport and SEND placements. The council previously had a dedicated Education Scrutiny Committee, but this was dissolved in 2017. My group has requested that any meetings should be open to both the public and the press, to ensure the scrutiny process is transparent.

New Fire Engines and Uniforms making Suffolk safer

Suffolk's firefighters are now kitted out in new state-of-the-art uniforms, making them safer than ever before. The new Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) saw its first action on 1 May 2019, as firefighters responded to reports of a washing machine fire near Bury St Edmunds. The new clothing is more lightweight, comfortable and tailored, including specific designs for men and women. There are also different uniforms for different incidents.

Three new fire appliances are also being rolled out, to be based at Framlingham, Holbrook and Long Melford fire stations.

This is the first major upgrade to firefighters' equipment since 2011. As well as providing firefighters with the latest PPE, the new contract also provides better value for the Service and Suffolk County Council. The old uniforms will be returned to their previous supplier, where they are recycled and often exported abroad, predominantly to African countries.

Poverty motion voted down by Council

At the Council AGM on 23 May, my group proposed a motion asking the Council to acknowledge the findings of the UN Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty following his visit to the UK in November last year, and to set-up a cross-party policy develop group tasked with investigating actions that Suffolk County Council could take to reduce poverty in the county. Unfortunately, the Conservative administration decided to vote against the motion.

The UN report found that 14 million people in the UK are living in poverty. Suffolk has not escaped the national crisis: earlier this month, End Child Poverty published its 2019 statistics which revealed that over 50,000 children (28.5%) in Suffolk are being brought up in poverty.

Rise in the numbers of care-leavers housed in unregulated accommodation

BBC Newsnight has reported a large rise in the number of care-leavers being housed in unregulated accommodation. Whilst this is a national issue, the figures for Suffolk were the fourth largest of all English authorities. Furthermore, in Suffolk the numbers of children living in unregulated accommodation has risen from 24 in 2009 to 113 in 2018.

Children in care may move to supported accommodation once they are over the age of 16, to encourage independent living. There are support workers living on site or paying regular visits, but the accommodation is not subject to the same checks and inspections as regular children's homes.

Ofsted rates Suffolk County Council Children's Services "Outstanding"

After a week-long inspection in April, Ofsted have given Suffolk County Council Children's Services an "outstanding" rating, an improvement from the previous rating of "good" in 2015. Suffolk County Council is one of only seven in the country to achieve this rating, and the positive report is testament to the hard-working frontline staff at the council.

However, the council does still struggle to fill social worker vacancies, particularly given it does not pay social workers as much as some neighbouring councils. Staff at the council are hopeful that this Ofsted report will help in attracting social workers to Suffolk.

Furthermore, this is in stark contrast to the inspection of Suffolk SEND services earlier this year, which Ofsted rated "inadequate". Although a SEND oversight board has been set up, this is only meeting four times per year and we do not have a representative on the board.

New system for funding sponsored bus services

A new system has been agreed for allocating funding to sponsored bus services, following a cross-party policy development panel (PDP).

In the past, decisions on allocating funding were made on subsidy per passenger figures and on the recommendations of officers within the Passenger Transport Unit, with no formal scoring. The new system devised by the PDP sets out a defined methodology for allocating resources, to ensure this process is consistent and transparent. Factors that will be taken into account include:

1. Average single passenger journeys per day of operation
2. Percentage of English National Concessionary Travel Scheme journeys for both age related and disabled passengers
3. Number of entitled students on bus route (additional weighting of 1.5)
4. Type of service, days operated and consideration of alternative services
5. Integration with bus services that operate on a commercial basis
6. Average cost per passenger journey

Restrictions on recycling

The amount of goods that can be recycled in Suffolk has reduced, with TetraPak cartons and metal items such as pots and pans no longer being accepted in recycling bins. This decision was made by the Suffolk Waste Partnership following a refurbishment of the Material Recycling Facility near Great Blakenham, because the new sorting equipment that is being installed will not be able to separate out cartons.

Cartons and metal items will now need to be taken to household recycling centres. In addition, new restrictions on composting mean that households can no longer put kitchen waste into brown bins.

Housing and the environment among priorities outlined by Suffolk County Council Leader

A new programme using council land to create much-needed homes and a plan to cut carbon emissions are among the priorities outlined by our leader today. In a speech to the council's Annual General Meeting, Councillor Matthew Hicks confirmed the authority's commitment to continuing work to protect vulnerable adults and children, improve Suffolk's roads and raising educational standards. He also outlined five new policy priorities which will be addressed in the coming twelve months, including proposals to start using council-owned land to create more homes in Suffolk and plans to cut carbon emissions, starting with a major policy review involving a cross-party group of councillors.

Building on work in the past twelve months, Councillor Hicks pledged to continue working collaboratively with district and borough councils, other public sector partners, businesses and residents to find the best ways of delivering services to the people that need them most.

Councillor Hicks also announced plans to work with partners, businesses and residents to develop a long-term vision for Suffolk, renew the council's approach to growing Suffolk's economy and for the council to act more commercially. Councillor Hicks confirmed the reappointment of his current cabinet members and deputy cabinet members, with the addition of Councillor Nick Gowrley who will lead the council's new economic development and housing portfolio. These councillors will be responsible for almost £500 million of public services each year.