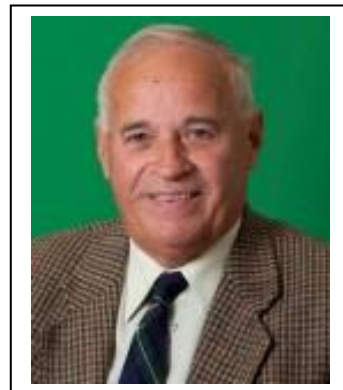


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Councillor

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Small changes make a big difference

That is the message as Suffolk County Council launches a new campaign looking at our relationship with alcohol.

Four short films have been produced following the stories of characters ('Billy Binge', 'Tellybox Trish', 'Big Match Barry' and 'My Time Mandy'), speaking about when and where they drink alcohol.

The films cover different habits when it comes to alcohol consumption; weekend binge drinking, drinking at home, drinking as a reward, and excessive drinking to celebrate an event or occasion, such as a football match. The campaign offers guidance and advice about how much is too much, the benefits of reducing alcohol intake and the small changes people can make to their drinking habits, which can make a big difference to their mental and physical wellbeing.

Evidence suggests direct links between alcohol and heart and liver disease, diabetes and some types of cancer. Alcohol is also highly calorific, contributing to weight gain. It can also influence the quality of sleep and take its toll on physical appearance over time.

The campaign highlights that as well as the health benefits, reducing alcohol consumption can also bring social benefits, such as being able to spend more quality time with your loved ones, saving money for something more meaningful and losing weight.

Suffolk County Council announces funding cuts to subsidised bus routes

Suffolk County Council has announced that 23 subsidised bus routes will no longer receive funding from the council, in a bid to save £340,000. This means that over a third of subsidised bus routes in the county will lose their funding.

The decision to cut £340,000 from the subsidised buses budget was made in February, when the Council agreed on the budget for the current financial year. I spoke against this cut at the time, as well as other cuts that will affect bus users such as the decision to no longer print bus timetables.

More details of which routes will be affected can be found at: <http://www.suffolkonboard.com/>

The council say that they will be engaging with bus operators to determine whether the routes can continue to run without council funding. I will keep you updated if there are any further developments.

Final Council overspend on 2018-19 budget

The final outturn figures for the 2018-19 budget have been published, showing that Suffolk County Council overspent by £4.5m (0.88% of the budget). Key areas of overspend included:

- Home to School Transport (£1.7m), due to the increasing demand for out-of-county SEND transport arrangements;
- Adult Care Purchasing Budget (£4m);
- Early Help and Specialist Services (£4.8m), due to the increasing number of children in care, especially those requiring specialist placements.

These areas of overspend were mitigated by underspends in other directorates.

Suffolk's Health and Wellbeing Board has committed to tackling poor mental health in Suffolk

Commitment made to tackling poor mental health by signing up to the Prevention Concordat for Better Mental Health.

Working closely with Public Health England, Suffolk's Health and Wellbeing Board is making significant steps towards promoting good mental health and preventing mental health problems. One in six adults experiences at least one diagnosable mental health problem in their lifetime. This is influenced by the environment in which we are born, grow, live and work, meaning many of these problems can be prevented.

Having good mental health is important because it can help us to be more resilient, feel good and function well, have more positive relationships with those around us and deal with difficult times now and in the future. The Prevention Concordat marks the first time agencies across the community and care sectors have come together to make prevention a priority for mental health. So far, 92 organisations representing all sectors have signed up and committed to action.

The commitment from Suffolk's Health and Wellbeing Board includes work to improve people's mental health, including preventing suicide, social prescribing initiatives and a pilot for a new online resource supporting young people aged 16-24. Promoting good mental health is everyone's responsibility and can only be achieved if organisations – including local authorities, NHS trusts, businesses, local communities, and religious groups – work together at local and national level.

By signing up to the concordat, Suffolk Health and Wellbeing Board is not only showing public leadership in addressing mental health problems in local communities; they are also putting effective prevention planning arrangements in place, using resources from Public Health England. As well as recognising that mental health is as important as physical health, this represents a movement away from stigma and fear, and towards achieving a fairer and more equal society.

Cross-party call for independent inquiry into SEND services

On 14 June I signed a cross-party letter to the Chief Executive of Suffolk County Council, asking her to establish an independent inquiry into the provision of SEND services in Suffolk.

This follows the Ofsted and Care Quality Commission reinspection earlier this year, when Suffolk County Council's SEND services were deemed to have made insufficient improvement.

Reports that health visitor numbers will be cut

It was reported in the Guardian and Observer that Suffolk County Council is planning to dramatically reduce the number of health visitors in Suffolk in order to make savings.

These plans have not been shared with councillors or the public yet, however the media claim to have seen internal SCC documents showing that the number of health visitors will be reduced by 25% through redundancies in order to save £1m. Health visitors would also have a reduced workload and only focus on the most vulnerable families, rather than all families in Suffolk. The rest of their current workload would need to be picked up by nurses or social workers.

SCC releases breakdown of Upper Orwell Crossing spend

The final costs of the abandoned Upper Orwell Crossings project have been released, and show that Suffolk County Council spent a total of £8.1m before deciding to not build the Crossings. Of this, over £4m was paid in fees to consultants.

More detail can be found at: <https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/assets/Roads-and-transport/public-transport-and-transport-planning/Upper-Orwell-Crossing-Final-Report-on-Project-Costs.pdf>

Department for Transport refuses funding for four village bypass

The Department for Transport has decided to not support the proposal for a £133m four village bypass in Suffolk, also known as the Suffolk Energy Gateway. The key reasons for the government's decision were:

- It is concerned about the overall value for money of the project;
- It felt the council had not provided enough money for it and neither had EDF as part of the case to build Sizewell C;
- There are concerns about the environmental impact of the road.

SCC misses children's care plan targets in 75% of cases

The Department for Education has published figures showing that Suffolk County Council exceeded the legal time limit of 20 weeks for issuing new education, health and care plans (EHCPs) in 75% of cases in 2018. This means that hundreds of children were left waiting for the appropriate support and is a significant increase compared to 2017, when 53% of cases went beyond the legal time limit.

Suffolk County Council has admitted that there needs to be rapid improvements to this process, and in the last few months it has managed to increase the proportion of EHCPs completed within the legal time limit to 42.5%.