

Parish Report September 2019

Councillor

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Plans to close children's centres confirmed as consultation is launched

On Tuesday 16 July, the Cabinet agreed to press forward with plans to close children's centres across Suffolk. Of the 38 centres in Suffolk, two have been earmarked for closure – Chatterbox in North Ipswich and Caterpillar in Woodbridge – whilst a further 13-19 could be "repurposed" as either early years or SEND provision.

The remaining centres would become Family Hubs, providing a range of support to children and young people aged 0-19 and their families. However, a number of these Hubs would only be part-time. There is also a recommendation to focus on outreach services, although it is not yet clear what the budget for this service would be.

The proposals will be consulted on by the county council in the autumn.

Pension fund begins to move away from fossil fuels

Suffolk Pension Fund has agreed to move £150m into a UBS Climate Aware World Equity Fund. Although a very small proportion of the £2.9 billion fund, this is the first step the Council has taken to move investments away from fossil fuels.

This will be followed up by a valuation in November to check the performance of the fund, with the hope that a larger amount can then be transferred into the climate-aware fund.

New model for specialist speech and language education

The Cabinet also agreed a new model for the provision of specialist speech and language education services.

The model focuses on early intervention and diagnosis, by training early years and primary school staff to identify speech and language needs and providing a specialist outreach service to schools. For children with the most complex needs, a new "Communication and Interaction" education pathway has been established for children aged 4 to 16 years, consisting of specialist units and new special schools. This will replace the current speech and language units which only cater for 5 to 7 year olds.

Carbon strategy agreed

Following the council's declaration of a climate emergency in March, the Cabinet has now agreed a strategic framework for meeting its commitment to be carbon neutral by 2030.

The report clearly states that in order to be effective, measures to cut carbon and mitigate climate change will need to be made across every department. It also includes a renewed commitment to become the Greenest County.

A cross-party policy development panel will begin in September, tasked with investigating how the council can meet its objectives and what investment is needed to ensure the council is carbon neutral by 2030. It is expected that the panel will report back to Cabinet in early 2020.

Northern Bypass consultation launched

Suffolk County Council, along with the district and borough councils, launched a consultation into the Ipswich Northern Route at the beginning of July. The consultation identifies three potential routes for the bypass, which will link the A12 and A14 corridors.

However, I am concerned that the consultation does not provide sufficient information: the county council have acknowledged that the road would result in the development of 15,000 additional homes, but they have not included these figures or the location of the developments within the consultation. Furthermore, the data provided does not take account of "induced traffic" when calculating traffic flows around Ipswich.

I also don't think that building a new road fits with the council's declaration of a climate emergency and commitment to be carbon-neutral by 2030.

The consultation will run until Friday 13 September. You can find the consultation, along with further information, here: <https://ipswichnorthernroute.org.uk/>

Hundreds of Suffolk Families in confusion over school busses

More than 200 Suffolk families will only learn about school transport after term starts. Hundreds of Suffolk parents have been told the county council is unable to deal with new applications for places on school transport buses before the start of term next month. Some say they have been told they will have to drive their children to their chosen school while officials at the council issue bus passes - even though the council officially says it will be sorted out by the start of term.

And there is ongoing resentment about changes to school transport arrangements which are seeing siblings being sent to different schools - or parents having to pay out for bus passes for one of their children.

The county is expecting to process about 1,800 new bus passes - but nearly 220 families are still waiting to hear if they will get places for their children on school transport.

Keeping Suffolk Villages safe with Lorry Watch

Two new Lorry Watch schemes have launched aimed at reducing the number of HGV drivers ignoring weight restrictions on the county's roads. The villages of Fornham All Saints (near Bury St Edmunds) and Barnham (near Thetford) join nine other similar schemes across Suffolk, set up in conjunction with Suffolk County Council's Trading Standards and Suffolk Highways.

Suffolk's Lorry Watch started in 2012 and to date has reported nearly 3,000 incidents of HGV vehicles exceeding weight limits, where clearly marked restriction signs are in place. Volunteers monitor their area and report suspected offenders.

The existing schemes have been a great success with only four repeat offenders being issued with a warning, meaning that drivers are taking notice when they are first contacted.

Local residents in Fornham All Saints and Barnham have been noticing HGV drivers regularly ignoring weight restrictions and wanted to do something about it.

Weight restriction orders make it an offence to drive a vehicle through the restricted area where the vehicle exceeds the weight limit imposed unless they are exempt, for example when delivering or collecting within the restriction zone. If drivers from the same haulage company are being reported, that firm will receive advice on training their staff. The offence remains with the driver unless the haulage firm has caused the offence. Trading Standards can enforce weight restriction orders under the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984.

If you are interested in joining Lorry Watch in an area which HGVs are abusing a weight restriction, contact lorrywatch@suffolk.gov.uk or **01473 264859** (option A).

Sudbury Care Home Crowned Olympics Champion

Red House Residential Home in Sudbury has been crowned 2019 Suffolk Care Home Olympics champions. They beat 38 other care homes from across the county to win the title. The annual competition, now in its third year, aims to give care home residents a fun and enjoyable experience of sport whilst highlighting the importance of physical activity within social care settings.

428 residents in 39 care settings across Suffolk competed in 3 sports (Boccia, fishing and curling) for a total of 239 hours over the winter and spring months with the top three homes then competing in a 'super-final' to decide the outright champions.

Chilton Court Care Home, Stowmarket and Haughgate House Nursing Home, Woodbridge were runners-up to Red House.

The Suffolk Care Home Olympics is delivered by social enterprise Elatus Sports in partnership with the Suffolk County Council led Most Active County Partnership.