

Parish Report February 2024

Councillor

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Information Updates

Cost of Living help and advice: <https://infolink.suffolk.gov.uk/kb5/suffolk/infolink/family.page?familychannel=6>

Benefits advice and support: <https://infolink.suffolk.gov.uk/kb5/suffolk/infolink/adult.page?adultchannel=0>

For information on supporting Ukrainian refugees in Suffolk, email: refugeesupport@suffolk.gov.uk or ukrainesupport@communityactionsuffolk.org.uk

Council Budget for 2024-25

At Scrutiny Committee on 11 January, we got our first look at the proposed budget for the financial year 2024-25. The council has projected increased spend for areas such as social care and SEND which are statutory services – this means that the council is required to spend this money by law.

As a result, important areas in the budget that can be cut have been, which will lead to cuts in Housing Related Support for those at risk of homelessness, support for people with learning disabilities and autism, and to the Skills team, who support young people not in education, employment or training (NEET). The budget also includes a proposed 100% cut to funding for museums and arts organisations from April 2025, with the funding for 2024-25 coming from government Covid monies to provide a transition period.

My group opposes the arts cuts and the other savings, which will hit the most vulnerable in our county. The budget proposals will be voted on during the Full Council meeting on Thursday 15 February.

Autism Strategy for Suffolk

At the Suffolk Health and Wellbeing Board on 18 January, the first draft of a Suffolk autism strategy was discussed, which will increase awareness and support for autistic people and make sure local services are accessible and meeting their needs.

The plans include supporting autistic people to look for work and those who are considering self-employment, tackling health and care inequalities, improving access to education and transition into higher education. The strategy was commissioned by Suffolk County Council and local NHS providers and has been developed in co-production with Suffolk people with autism to reflect their views and experiences.

New Funding to Combat Serious Violence

Suffolk's Safer Stronger Communities Board has announced a fund of £150,000 from the Home Office to support Suffolk's Serious Violence Strategy. Organisations can bid for funding for specific projects which support the work of Suffolk's Serious Violence Strategy, with allocation of funding managed through Suffolk Community Foundation.

The Serious Violence Strategy focuses on young people and communities at risk of becoming involved in serious violence, and the funding for projects is available to charities, voluntary sector organizations, social enterprises, parish councils, educational settings and other public bodies from April 2024. Applications are invited for grants between £4,000 and £15,000 and organisations can apply by visiting:

<https://www.suffolkcf.org.uk/grants/seriousviolencedutyfund/>

Blue Badge Team – Change of Telephone Number

As a direct result of customer feedback, the Blue Badge phone number will be changing, and there will now be a dedicated phone line for Blue Badge customers. From **31 January** the Blue Badge team will be answering enquires on **03456 066 077**, this number will be visible online across the SCC Website, InfoLink and any future published materials. This is a change from the current telephone number, which is 0808 800 4005.

For more information about how you can apply for a blue badge or assist someone to make an application, please visit <https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/roads-and-transport/parking/blue-badge-scheme>

DEFRA's Property Flood Resilience Grant

Those whose homes or businesses were flooded by Storm Babet and have not yet applied for the initial £500 flood recovery grant payment should do so as soon as possible as this is the first step in applying for the further £5,000 for flood protection from the government's Property Flood Resilience (PFR) Grant. The application process for the latter will begin in early 2024 and after initial eligibility checks by SCC, property owners will be responsible for sourcing an independent surveyor and PFR contractor. Payment of up to £5,000 including VAT will be paid retrospectively to the property owner once the Council receives proof of the completed installation and invoicing for the approved measures.

Further information about the grant eligibility, conditions and the forthcoming application process can be found here: <https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/property-flood-resilience-grant>

For more information about the flood investigations which are due to take place in the wake of Storm Babet, please see <https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/roads-and-transport/flooding-and-drainage/storm-babet>

Flood preparation advice: <https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/suffolk-fire-and-rescue-service/fire-and-rescue-safety-advice-in-the-community/preparing-for-flooding>

Flood recovery advice and support: <http://www.suffolk.gov.uk/about/flood-recovery-information-for-suffolk>

'Good Journey' Scheme for Visitor Attractions

Visitor attractions in Suffolk are invited to sign up for a new scheme promoting car-free days out in the county. Suffolk Growth Partnership and Suffolk County Council have teamed up with national organisation 'Good Journey' to create the scheme, which launches in March.

Around 25 local tourism and visitor attractions are invited to join the Suffolk Good Journey scheme offering residents and visitors discounts and incentives to leave the car at home and explore more of the county on foot, by bike or using public transport.

Participating attractions will be supported and will feature on goodjourney.org.uk which provides travel information and discounts to domestic and international visitors and there will a marketing campaign to promote it. Visitor attractions and venues interested in joining Suffolk Good Journey can find out more details by contacting Loretta Jones at Good Journey on loretta@goodjourney.org.uk or info@suffolkgrowth.co.uk

Sizewell C Construction Begins

Construction begins this month of the controversial new power station at Sizewell, a project that is forecast to take 17 years to complete. This will have a massive impact on local communities, the coastal environment and transport routes in the county. Suffolk County Council has secured £250m in mitigation monies for Suffolk communities, but this will still create a lot of upheaval in the county and the council has a role to play in making sure Sizewell C make every effort to minimise its impact and listens to the concerns of residents and local businesses.

Council to propose new funding for arts & heritage in Suffolk

Suffolk County Council has announced its intention to create a new funding pot open to all arts and heritage organisations in the county.

- Core funding for nine arts and heritage organisations still to cease after 2024/25
- New £500,000 funding pot proposed from 2025/26, open to all arts and heritage organisations in Suffolk
- Proposal to be tabled at Cabinet meeting on 30 January

Following this week's announcement from government that £600 million of further funding will be available to local councils, the council intends to propose a new £500,000 project fund to which all Suffolk's arts and heritage organisations can apply.

However, this does not alter the difficult financial decisions the council is having to make so that it can prioritise spending on services like SEND, home to school transport and children in care. An extra £74 million is still needed over the next two years to protect the county's most vulnerable adults and children.

Proposals to end the core funding of £528,000 of nine arts and heritage organisations after the 2024/25 financial year, are still in place. This funding will be replaced with the new £500,000 project funding pot, open to all arts and heritage organisations, from April 2025.

The new £500,000 fund would contribute to delivering on the council's ambitions such as looking after the health and wellbeing of Suffolk's residents, particularly those most in need of extra support to live as safely, independently, and healthily as possible.

The impact of the government announcement for further funding for councils will be discussed at Suffolk County Council's Cabinet Meeting on 30 January 2024, where proposals will be explored.

Fake university website shut down by Suffolk Trading Standards

A bogus website for a non-existent college in Suffolk offering fake courses costing thousands of pounds is closed down by Trading Standards. A website for a fake university aiming to scam money from overseas students has been shut down by Suffolk Trading Standards.

Calling itself the College of Suffolk, the website claimed the university had been founded in 1990 and was located on Queen Street in Ipswich. Quoting yearly fees ranging from £3,500 to £8,900, it claimed to offer courses in acting, musical theatre, dance and performance. The site used images of the real University of Suffolk and even had a page promoting the county, saying how it was home to its own breed of horses, breweries and famous celebrities such as singer Ed Sheeran.

A foreword by college 'President' Dr Stephen Spinks talked of how it provides "exciting learning opportunities in business, human resources, accountancy, finance, musician (sic) and art – all critical areas for the world of work." It is the second time such a fake college has been foiled by Trading Standards – an identical scam using the same name and information was closed down in 2019.

The website was being run from Hong Kong and while Suffolk Trading Standards have had no reports of victims in the UK there may be some overseas.

Trading Standards says anyone considering applying for a college course can beat degree fraud through the Higher Education Degree Datacheck (HEDD) website <https://hedd.ac.uk/> where people can:

- Check whether a university or college is an official degree awarding body by using the look-up service
- Download free toolkits allowing employers, universities and colleges to tackle degree fraud
- Check original degree certificates with the issuing university
-

Degree fraud can be reported to the HEDD fraud team on 020 8148 2400.

If you have concerns about a website, please report it to Trading Standards via 0808 223 1133.

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