

Parish Report June 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>

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>

Funding for Local Governments

My group proposed a motion for council on Thursday 23 May to lobby the government for improved funding for local authorities, which was seconded by the Conservative administration and voted through unanimously in the chamber. Politicians of all parties are concerned by the £4 billion funding 'gap' predicted for councils in the next few years, particularly for social care. To balance the books this year, Suffolk County Council had to withdraw £15.9 million from its reserves - the equivalent of council savings accounts – but this is not a sustainable approach. Councils that have become bankrupt have to cut services back to the minimum they have to provide by law, and seek to raise revenue by increasing council tax and other avenues they have such as charges for parking or social care.

Transport for Post-16 Students

Cabinet also considered a paper on recommendations for charges for post-16 school transport. Although students now have to be in education or training up to the age of 18, the council receives no funding from the government to pay for their transport. This means the council asks parents and carers to pay for part of the cost with the rest subsidised by the council. In 2023-24, the average cost for a mainstream seat was £1,701 and the average cost for a SEND student seat is £11,819.

The proposal approved by Cabinet was for the charge for a mainstream seat to rise to £1,050 a year, which is a steep £90 increase from last year. There will be no increase for SEND students so their seats will remain at £780 a year. The 50% reduction in charge for families on a low income and in receipt of free school meals will continue for another year. The council will continue to signpost families to public transport routes where these may be cheaper and in addition, many schools have bursaries for travel which students can apply for.

SEND Strategy 2024-29

On Tuesday 21 May, Cabinet approved the new SEND Strategy for the Local Area SEND Partnership, which is made up of the council's inclusion service and relevant NHS services. The new strategy takes on board recommendations from the recent Ofsted/CQC inspection to set the Partnership's direction for SEND services for the next five years. The strategy was co-produced with children, parents, carers and members of staff who work in SEND services and aims to improve services in several areas: communication, outcomes for SEND children and improved timeliness and quality of Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) and Annual Reviews. The strategy still requires some formatting/design work but will soon be available to view on the council's website.

Children's Services Inspection

The council has just received notification that Ofsted will be coming for a two week inspection of its children's services. This inspection is focused on social care, youth justice, corporate parenting, family services and safeguarding. It will also look at partnership working with other council teams and external partners to support children and keep them safe. Suffolk County Council had its last children's services Ofsted inspection five years ago and was rated as Outstanding.

New Vehicles and Equipment for Suffolk Fire and Rescue

Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service has unveiled a £3.5 million investment in new firefighting vehicles and equipment, including a 32m turntable ladder vehicle, a specialist rescue tender, six new fire engines, a driver trainer vehicle plus a fleet of electric pool cars. The new vehicles will be on the road by summer 2024. The new vehicles are part of a planned replacement programme whereby fire engines are replaced every 15 years, and include the latest technology to help keep Suffolk residents safe. They also support the council's net zero targets as officer and pool cars will now be electric vehicles. Fire engines are generally diesel vehicles, although there are some electric-hybrid vehicles currently being trialled in London.

Dementia Strategy

Suffolk County Council, NHS partners and adult social care organisations have launched a dementia strategy. The number of people with dementia in the UK was estimated to be close to one million in 2021, but by 2050 this figure is expected to rise to 1.6 million people. In Suffolk, a predominantly rural county with an ageing population where 23.6% of Suffolk residents are 65 years or over - higher than the England average - the number of people who develop dementia is likely to be higher, so having a robust and effective strategy to manage this is essential. The strategy has been co-produced with people with dementia and their carers, and will look to promote early diagnosis, providing better information about care and treatment options, and focus on improved signposting for people of all ages with dementia, their carers and families, to help them get the support they want and need to enable them to live well with dementia within their own community. You can read the new dementia strategy here: suffolk.gov.uk/asset-library/digital-version-suffolk-dementia-strategy-2024-20292.pdf

Nature Survey

In order to prepare Suffolk's Local Nature Recovery Strategy, the council has launched a public survey so residents can share their favourite nature spots and which habitats they think should be protected. Farmers, landowners and land managers are also encouraged to submit practical, achievable proposals to support nature conservation, as well as sharing how land is currently managed and any challenges faced applying for government funding schemes. The strategy will form a plan to help reverse the decline in nature across the county, and to connect and expand existing areas that are important for wildlife and the landscape.

You can share your thoughts in the Suffolk Local Nature Recovery Strategy Survey by visiting <https://www.nsnrp.org/get-involved>. It closes on 30 June 2024.

Norwich to Tilbury Pylons

At Cabinet on Tuesday 21 May, two reports were tabled on Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs) in the region. The first was our response to the Five Estuaries wind farm proposals, this will have landfall in Essex but will be visible from the Suffolk coast and the developers are paying for a wildlife project on Orford Ness as environmental compensation. The second report detailed the council's response to the proposed Norwich to Tilbury 400kV grid reinforcement, and the Cabinet voted that the council should object and call for a pause until alternative options have been explored. The proposals include 183 kilometres of pylons, with four sections of underground cabling running through and near to the Dedham Vale National Landscape and the Waveney valley, but the council wants to see alternative options explored for additional undergrounding in the Waveney valley, and expressed concerns about the route which see pylons placed close to several Suffolk airfields. The council also discussed how to make sure that energy projects in the county were coordinated, as it was agreed that the impact of all the proposed projects in a similar timeframe would have a massive impact on the county, its landscape, economy and transport routes.

East of England Local Authorities collaborate to appeal for more foster families to work with their Council

Eleven local authorities across the East of England have joined forces in a bid to collectively recruit more foster carers to look after some of the region's most vulnerable children.

Suffolk is taking part in a new initiative for fostering under the banner Foster East. There is an urgent need for foster carers in the East of England with more than 7,000 vulnerable children already in the care of their local authority, and a further 150 children coming into care every month.

The Foster East initiative which is funded by the Department of Education and launched today Wednesday 29 May 2024, is a new, collaborative approach to foster carer recruitment and support. Councils will work together to provide more comprehensive training, support and best practice. Each applicant will be nurtured through their fostering journey with their local council and via a buddy network. Foster East advisors will help people find out how fostering can become part of their life.

In Suffolk there are more than 900 children and young people ranging from babies to 18-year-olds who need safe, loving and nurturing homes where they can thrive and develop. Every local authority aims to keep children and young people local to their support networks, but a shortage of foster families in our area means this is not always possible.

Fostering is a flexible role with options for short term care from a weekend a month to longer term opportunities, all providing life-changing support for local children. Foster carers working for independent fostering agencies are also invited to transfer to their local council via Foster East. They will benefit from local training, and a linked foster carers support network which will offer support for foster families needing a short break.

Foster East will give people considering fostering the opportunity to speak to an advisor from 8am to 8pm daily, and the chance to talk to an experienced foster carer to find out more about what the role involves and ask any questions they may have. More information can be found on the [Foster East website](#).

Funding secured to boost digital tech innovation

Funding has been secured to boost support for the digital technology sector in Suffolk and Norfolk.

Suffolk County Council, working with Norfolk County Council and Connected Innovation, has secured funding from Barclays Eagle Labs Ecosystem Partnership Programme to boost support for the region's digital technology sector. The funding will be used to deliver 'The Future', a joint project which aims to support and scale digital technology innovation in Suffolk and Norfolk in three critical ways:

- Developing a local ecosystem with stronger connections between experienced entrepreneurs and the next generation of regional startups
- Developing a process for identifying, engaging and supporting early-stage startups and integrating them into the community
- Creating more opportunities for founders from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds by offering stipends to those who would not otherwise be able to commit to their venture full-time.
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The project is bolstered by further funding from Connected Innovation as well as match funding from Suffolk and Norfolk County Councils. The project will be delivered by Akcela in Norfolk and Innovation Labs in Suffolk.

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