

Parish Report October 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>

Financial Monitoring Report for 2024-25

We heard at Cabinet on 10th September about the council's latest financial forecast for 2024-25, and so far the year seems to be going better than last year, with a projected overspend of £1 million compared to last year when the council was forecasting an overspend for 2023-24 of £29.3 million.

Some services are still overspent, for example costs for Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and care purchasing in adult social care services. Areas that are predicted to come in under budget have helped balance this out. However, the council's reserves, the 'savings' it holds for a rainy day, are taking another big hit this year and are due to reduce by £22.2 million.

This is a rate of spending by the council which is unsustainable even for a few more years. Like other councils in the same position, we will be hoping for an improved funding settlement from the new government.

Recycling and Waste Collection Changes

At Cabinet on Tuesday 10 September, we heard about the changes the council is preparing to make to prepare for the new recycling and waste collection requirements set out in the Environment Act 2021. This new law means that district and borough councils must additionally collect food waste, glass and cartons from residents by 2026, and also collect plastic film from 2027. It is up to each district and borough council how they choose to arrange their waste collection schedule, and they will be communicating these changes to residents soon.

However, the county council also needs to make changes as it is responsible for storing and processing waste and recycling after it is collected. The council will be spending around £4.535m, allocated from its reserves, to update waste transfer stations in the county where waste is taken after it is collected. The council will also need to set up a new contract for anaerobic digestion of the food waste.

Funding to Improve Home Energy Efficiency

My group were disappointed that the council is projecting to return £5 million of funding to the government which could have been used to improve the energy efficiency of homes in Suffolk. The Warm Homes Suffolk Scheme is now closed, but the council has heard that a similar scheme may be on its way and we would encourage residents who are eligible to apply.

The previous scheme enabled people to buy extra insulation and undertake other improvements to improve the energy efficiency of their homes, which will also reduce the amount they are paying to heat them. We will have more information on future schemes at a later date and will provide further information then.

Arts and Culture Project Funding

The council has launched its new £500,000 Culture Project Fund to support local arts and museum projects across the county. This is the bidding system for arts funding for the financial year 2024-25 which was announced by the council's administration as part of the budget process in early 2024, and will see a larger amount of smaller grants for projects and organizations compared to previous years. The fund offers three tiers of grants:

Small grants up to £1,500

Medium grants up to £15,000

Large grants up to £50,000

Eligible applicants include arts organizations and museums, skilled freelancers, registered charities, community interest companies, non-profits, and social enterprises based in Suffolk. For more information on deadlines and award dates, or to find out how to apply, please visit

www.suffolk.gov.uk/cultureprojectfund or contact the Arts & Museums Team at cultureprojectfund@suffolk.gov.uk.

Apply for Primary and Secondary School Places

Parents and carers can now apply for a place in the normal year of entry at a primary (including infant and junior) school and secondary school for September 2025. The deadline for applications to secure a place at a secondary school is Thursday 31 October 2024 and for primary school places, including infant and junior schools, the deadline is Wednesday 15 January 2025. All applications received by the closing dates are processed at the same time using the schools' oversubscription criteria to prioritise applications when necessary. Late applications are processed after all of those received on time.

SCC advise that parents and carers think about how their child will travel to school before they apply for a school place. They can check which is their child's nearest suitable school on our Nearest School Checker because it might not be their catchment area school: <http://nearestschool.suffolk.gov.uk/>

Advice and guidance about the school application process is available here:

www.suffolk.gov.uk/admissions

Suffolk Devolution Deal Withdrawn

Following the change in government, the devolution deal which had been tabled for Suffolk has now been withdrawn, as has the deal for Norfolk which was along similar lines. Devolution would have provided the county with extra funding and power to make more decisions locally, for example transport and adult education. Although this is being reported as a snub for the county, my group feels that devolution deals offered by the new government are likely to be more ambitious, and will avoid the possible decision deadlock caused by a directly elected leader being from a different political party to the majority of councillors.

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