

Parish Report – January 2023

Councillor

Andrew Stringer (Upper Gipping)

Broadway House
Broad Road
Cotton, Stowmarket
IP14 4ND

07774 199061

andrew.stringer@suffolk.gov.uk

Budget Setting

The draft budget papers for 2024/2025 were made public on the 3.1.2024, The settlement this year from central government has been disappointing, and has led the administration to draft a budget with a series of cuts, on top of a proposed maximum increase in council tax. The Budget scrutiny papers agree that despite the increased overall funding for adult social care, that complaints will rise, while we are proposing doing less for those not in education training etc (neets) other than collect data on their number, finding apprenticeships, helping finding work etc will no longer be budgeted for.

The draft budget also proposes Suffolk County Council closing two records offices, one in Bury St Edmunds one in Lowestoft, centralising all Suffolks records in The Hold in Ipswich.

The draft budget also includes the withdrawal of £500,000.00 from the Arts,

Flooding in Suffolk

Recent high rainfall has led to many Suffolk residents' homes being flooded, and flooding more generally on roads. At Council on 7 December, a motion was passed for the council to review the frequency of drain and gully clearance in areas at risk of flooding, and to work closely with districts and boroughs, Anglian Water and the Environment Agency to help prevent future flooding. My group had hoped to introduce further measures on regularity of maintenance, but this was not supported by the Conservative administration. The motion that was passed was preceded by an announcement by the council of £1m in extra funding to investigate flooding incidents in the county.

Details of a government-funded scheme from DEFRA whereby Suffolk residents can apply for up to £5,000 to help protect their property from future flooding can be found at this link, with applications from January 2024: <https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/about/flood-recovery-information-for-suffolk>

Sea Link Consultation Response

On Tuesday 12 December, Suffolk County Council Cabinet reviewed their proposed response to the National Grid's proposals to link up Suffolk and Kent with undersea cables and landfall at Aldeburgh and a substation at nearby Friston. Councillors in these areas were particularly concerned about the impact on the natural environment and the Suffolk coastline, with most councillors agreeing that engagement with the community about the proposals had been poor, and the timing of the construction coinciding with Sizewell C to create even more pressure on the county's transport routes and tourism industry. Cabinet decided that they would not lodge a holding objection at this stage, but their response to the National Grid consultation outlined their concerns and the possibility of objecting in future once more details were known.

SCC Carbon Net Zero Ambitions

The council's Scrutiny Committee met on Monday 11 December to review the council's progress towards becoming carbon net zero by 2030. Overall there had been a 10% reduction in emissions in 2022/23, due to reduced energy use for street lighting (a recent upgrade programme) and reduced gas consumption at SCC property and schools.

However, the council is not on target to be carbon neutral by 2030, at least partially due to the third scope of indirect emissions – this includes emissions by suppliers and contractors used by the council which are difficult to measure accurately and control. The supply chain represents 91% of the council's total footprint, and it has updated its contract terms and conditions to include annual reporting on reducing carbon emissions, and also requires suppliers to sign up to its Carbon Charter and Climate Change Commercial Ask.

Getting Children Ready for Education

On Thursday 14 December, the council's Education and Children's Scrutiny Committee met to review the support the council provides to prepare children for school. This includes the county's nurseries and early years providers, health services for 0–5-year-olds and Family Hubs (formerly children's centres). In recent years the council has worked with the National Literacy Hub to try and engage children with reading, after research in 2020 concluded that educational attainment for Suffolk children was much lower than it should be.

The Committee acknowledged the good work that was going on in a challenging area and urged that recruitment of health visitors be prioritised by SCC to fill the current vacancies (21%). There were also plans to improve the council's digital platform - in partnership with parents - so they were able to find information and support more easily.

DEFRA's Property Flood Resilience Grant

As well as the initial £500 grant payment and council tax/business rate discounts, residents whose homes have been flooded may also be eligible for up to £5,000 from the Property Flood Resilience (PFR) Grant, which the government requires Suffolk County Council to administer on their behalf. The application process 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>

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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>