

Parish Report – March 2024

Councillor

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Council Budget for 2024-25

At Council on 15 February, Suffolk councillors met to discuss and vote on the administration's budget proposals. The council is borrowing heavily from its reserves to meet the growing demand for social care for adults and children, and council tax is due to rise by £74 annually for Band D properties from April this year. There will also be cuts to Family Hubs (children's centres) and Housing Related Support, which supports vulnerable people like care leavers to find accommodation. Funding for arts and museums will be maintained for 2024-25 but not from SCC core funding, and subject to a bidding process for grants from April 2025. The Bury St Edmunds and Lowestoft local archives will be moved to The Hold in Ipswich, which like the arts funding changes has been controversial.

My group were concerned about the lack of core funding from Suffolk County Council to arts and museums, as this is how they can secure funding from other sources, and we proposed an amendment to this effect. We also suggested that some of the council's remaining Covid funding from the government be used to support young people not in education, employment or training, as this cohort had suffered a lot of upheaval in their final years of schooling and exams. Support for young people not in education, employment and training is one of the services that is due to be cut in the administration's budget plans. Our amendment was declined by the Conservatives, as was the Labour amendment which also proposed to reverse some of the planned cuts.

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.

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.

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/>

Ofsted/CQC SEND Inspection Report

As you may have read in the local press, Ofsted and CQC published their joint report into SEND services in Suffolk at the beginning of the month. The report was scathing about the county's SEND provision and detailed the failures of the council to communicate and work with parents and carers, improve the EHCP and annual review processes and waiting times, improve outcomes and reduce exclusions. My group was disappointed and concerned that the services are yet to get to grips with improving a service that has now received a third poor inspection result in a row and we offered our assistance to the Local Area Partnership (Suffolk County Council and NHS teams) in preparing the Priority Action Plan they now need to submit to Ofsted and CQC by 7 March.

The poor report led to the resignation of the Cabinet members for SEND, Education and Children's Services and prompted a reshuffle of the political leadership at the council. This report will be devastating for parents of children with special needs in Suffolk, and the council will need to work hard to make improvements quickly and build back trust.

'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 be 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

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>

Flood Resilience

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>

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Website - [Suffolk Green, Liberal Democrat and Independent Group – The GLI Group at Suffolk County Council \(suffolkgli.wordpress.com\)](http://suffolkgli.wordpress.com)

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>