

Cllr Matthew Hicks 2019 Annual Report for the Thredling Division

Suffolk County Council 2019/20 budget approved

On 14 February 2019, Suffolk County Council concluded its budget setting process for this coming financial year (2019/2020). From 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020, Suffolk County Council will spend almost £10 million a week across all its services following approval of this budget of £519.3 million. Over the period 2011-12 to 2018-19 the Council has made over £260 million of savings in response to reductions in funding from Central Government and increasing demand for services. For 2019/20 the Council has proposed a range of savings totalling around £13 million. These savings are required to help balance the budget - something that the Council must do by law. Recognising the unrelenting rise in demand and the complexity of support required by vulnerable children and adults in Suffolk, the Council are significantly increasing spending in these two top priority areas. The net budget for Adult and Community Services (ACS) will rise to £243m and the net budget for Health, Wellbeing and Children's Services (HWCS) will rise to £147m. This is an increase of just over £14 million for ACS and HWCS. ACS and HWCS will account for 75% of the total spend in 2019/2020 – three in every four pounds the Council spends. General council tax will rise by 2.99% this year. The Council are also applying the final 1% of the six per cent Social Care precept allowed over the years 2017/18 to 2019/20. The overall increase in council tax is one per cent less than for 2018/19. The four-year investment in surface-dressing our roads continues into its third year and the Council will treat 1,000 miles of Suffolk's roads by the end of 2020 as promised. The Council has also maintained Suffolk Fire and Rescue's budget and protected Suffolk's Library services. The Council is looking to maximise the financial contribution from its medium-term programmes, which focus on transforming how the Council delivers its services and works with other authorities and public sector partners. The Council's transformation programmes have saved over £12 million in 2018/19 and £12-£13 million of savings are planned for 2019/20.

Plan for £6million upgrades to Suffolk recycling centres

On 24 July 2018, Suffolk County Council's Cabinet approved a plan to invest £6million into upgrading Suffolk's recycling centres. The plan has earmarked £3m for the Foxhall Recycling Centre – Suffolk's busiest with 20% of all recycling waste in the county – and £1m for Haverhill for "urgent improvements". The plans will see improvements to traffic access at Foxhall and measures to prevent people from having to climb steps to dispose of their waste in the containers. Existing planning permission for work expires in March 2021. Currently at Haverhill the site has to be closed when containers are emptied because of space. The funding aims to double the size of the site and prevent such closures. Elsewhere, £1m has been earmarked for a site to replace the Portman's Walk Recycling Centre in Ipswich town centre, and a further million for the same in Stowmarket. The existing Ipswich and Stowmarket sites are considered to be severely constrained for space, with no expansion opportunities available and the surrounding roads not offering a safe area to queue onto the facility. Construction for improvements is expected to get underway in 2019/20.

The Hold construction is underway

By November 2018, the construction of The Hold building was well underway. The Hold will deliver a new home for the majority of Suffolk's unique archival collections, as well as state-of-the-art public facilities including seminar rooms and a 200-seat auditorium. The new building, which will be situated near the junction of Fore Street and Grimwade Street in Ipswich, will be part of the University of Suffolk campus and will be run by the county and the university together. Work began on the construction of The Hold building in August 2018, with the demolition of a derelict building at the northern end of the site. The construction will focus on the strong rooms first, where the archives will be kept. The building will formally open to the public in Spring 2020. Once finished, more than 100 direct and indirect full-time jobs will be created as well as training and apprenticeships.

Suffolk's roads warming to £300,000 thermal patching technology

January 2019 saw Suffolk Highways celebrating road repair success following a £300,000 investment in Nu-phalt Thermal Patching technology. The investment, which has been funded from the extra £9.67 million received from central government in the autumn, has aided the county's Highways teams to carry out more effective, longer-lasting repairs to Suffolk's road surface. Over the month of January, Suffolk Highways deployed three thermal road repair machines which repaired approximately 1,700 potholes county-wide. The process includes an eight-minute heating cycle of the road surrounding the defect allowing for the existing road surface to be heated to 200 Celsius. The surface is then raked, topped up with bitumen binder and pre-heated material, then compacted. This all takes place within the service's much-favoured 15-minute temporary closure. The process does not require excavation of the highway, meaning no dust or noise, and better still, no waste material. The result also means there are no surface joints, which can be prone to faster deterioration. Following its success, Suffolk Highways is now looking to accommodate this technology by adapting some of its own fleet to self-deliver this repair technique from March 2019.

Department for Education recognises outstanding performance by Suffolk students

On 24 January 2019, the Department for Education published revised GCSE and A Level results.

GCSE - Suffolk has risen in national league tables for students in the county achieving the standard GCSE pass in English and Maths. Department for Education figures confirm that 1% more students in Suffolk are achieving the expected standards in English and Maths at GCSE compared with last year. Since 2015 there has been a change to the way that English and Maths GCSEs are graded. Results are now graded from 9 to 1, (previously A to G) with 9 being the highest and 1 being the lowest. The expected standard for pupils to achieve is now a grade 4 (a standard pass) and above (previously a C grade and above), with grade 5 considered a 'strong pass'. These changes will be phased in to cover all subjects by 2020. 64% of students in Suffolk are now achieving the expected standard in English and Maths, putting Suffolk in the top half of authorities achieving this standard.

GCSE progress remains above average and Suffolk students have seen a steep increase this year with a Progress 8 score of +0.08, compared with -0.02 nationally. This figure puts Suffolk in the number 1 position in our statistical neighbour group. Progress 8 measures how well pupils of all abilities have progressed by comparing them with students who achieved similar levels in Key Stage 2 across the country. Suffolk is in the top half of authorities for this figure, ranked 42nd out of 151.

The percentage of disadvantaged pupils in the county achieving the standard pass in English and Maths is in line with national figures. The Progress 8 figure for disadvantaged pupils is also above the national level and is in the top half of authorities, ranked 42nd out of 151 (up from 67th in 2016).

A Level - The validated A Level figures confirm that Suffolk pupils have once again performed well with the number of A*- E grades remaining above the national average figures. The figures show that 98.1% of A Levels taken in the county have been awarded an A*-E grade, compared to 97.6% nationally. A Level attainment is measured by the Department for Education using a points system. Points are given based on the type of A Level and the grade achieved. For example, an A Level at grade A is worth 50 points, whereas an AS Level would be worth half of this. Suffolk's A Level average points per entry this year has risen by 0.3 to 30.3 compared with this time last year.

Green light to develop more specialist education placements in Suffolk

On 29 January 2019, Suffolk County Council's Cabinet agreed recommendations to move forward with creating more specialist education places in Suffolk. Suffolk will need between 300 to 400 places for children with additional needs between now and 2020, and this figure is likely to continue to increase. The demand for specialist education places in Suffolk is rising rapidly due to the county's population growth, advances in medicine, and the increasing complexity of specialist needs.

The recommendations include three new special schools and 36 specialist units attached to existing mainstream schools, which combined will create over 800 new specialist education places in the county. The Cabinet also agreed that a clarified education pathway for specialist provision is created

to assist families in understanding what the local offer is. Following the approval of the recommendations, the proposal to borrow up to £45.1 million to fund the new places will now go to the county council's Capital Strategy Group to be reviewed. If agreed, the decision will go back to Cabinet in the Spring for final sign-off so the recommendations can be rolled out.

County Council announces timescale to progress the Ipswich Northern Route project

On 27 February, the Leader of Suffolk County Council, Matthew Hicks, announced the timescale to progress the Ipswich Northern Route project. Cllr Hicks outlined the next steps in producing the Strategic Outline Business Case, which will examine and ultimately clarify the feasibility of an Ipswich northern route. Discussions about an Ipswich northern route have been well documented over the years. This announcement confirms the County Council's commitment to explore these formally with a public consultation which will inform the Strategic Outline Business Case to be put to government and published later in the year. The timescale for moving the project forward is: The stage one study and report into possible highways options was completed in 2017. The options assessment and development commissioned in May 2018 is currently being evaluated and prepared for shortlisting, prior to consultation. Public consultation on the route details, alignment options and junction options with the A14 and A12 will begin in the Summer 2019. Completion of the Strategic Outline Business Case to be shared with government, local MPs and the public by Autumn 2019. The options assessment, that forms a key part of the Strategic Outline Business Case, is required to look at all other viable transport and traffic mitigation options. This will confirm whether the road alignments published in 2017 are indeed the best solution for the county. After carefully considering the assessment and developing these options further, the next stage is public consultation to begin in summer 2019. The initial study, options assessment and the results of the public consultation inform the Strategic Outline Business Case, which will provide clarity on the feasibility of the project and will determine whether the project can proceed to the next stage. That will be shared publicly for consideration in the Autumn of 2019. Suffolk County Council has been working with District and Borough Councils to develop the project and will continue to do so in the future.

Carers celebrate top accolade with 'Outstanding' rating from the Care Quality Commission

On 19 October 2018, it was announced that the standard of care provided by Mid Suffolk Home First has been rated as Outstanding by the Care Quality Commission. Mid Suffolk Home First, which is provided by Suffolk County Council, provides a short-term reablement service and a longer-term care service. Inspectors, who visited in July 2018, said the quality of care was 'exceptional'. Under CQC's programme of inspections, the service was rated according to whether it is safe, effective, caring, responsive and well-led. Mid Suffolk Home First is rated Outstanding for being responsive and well-led, and Good for being safe, caring and effective. The reablement and care services offered by Mid Suffolk Home First support people following a period of ill health or a significant loss in their ability to manage their day to day care needs. The service aims to help the person reach their optimum level of independence.

Suffolk's tourist trade booming

Suffolk's tourism trade has seen its biggest boom for a decade, with the visitor economy reaching the £2 billion mark for the first time. Interim figures released on 8 August 2018 by Visit Suffolk showed that tourism grew by at least five per cent in 2017, more than double the year before. Overnight visits and lengths of stay for tourists were also up by more than 4 per cent. Figures show visitors now spend more money on each trip to the county than ever before, with the value of the day market up more than seven per cent. The number of jobs in the county's tourism sector rose by 6 per cent to 42,428. This means 13.6 per cent of all employment in Suffolk is in the tourism sector.

Matthew Hicks - County Councillor for the Thredling Division

Tel : 01728 628176 Mob : 07824474741 E-mail : matthew.hicks@suffolk.gov.uk