

Cllr Matthew Hicks 2020 Annual Report for the Thredling Division

County Council approves budget to spend more on services for vulnerable residents

On 13 February 2020, Suffolk County Council approved its annual budget. The Council will increase its spending power again this coming financial year, particularly in Children and Adult services, where demand continues to rise year on year. In 2020/2021, the Council's budget will rise to £556million which represents an increase of £37m (7.1%) from 2019/20. Children and Adult Services represent around 70% of the Council's overall spend. This year's budget is based on a 12-month financial settlement from government, rather than the three or four-year agreement which is usually offered. As well as addressing the need to maintain funding for key services, the Council will invest an additional £3.5m into two one-year programmes, the Suffolk 2020 fund (£3m) and a highways investment fund (£500k). The Suffolk 2020 fund will be used for projects that can deliver a real difference for local communities. The intention is to adopt good ideas covering more than one area of Suffolk, rather than having a number of small-scale projects. To qualify for the fund, projects must link to one of the following themes: carbon reduction, carbon offset, road safety, natural environment, built environment, innovation and use of technology. Each project must offer a clear return on investment through positive economic, social, or environmental impact. County Councillors can put ideas forward on behalf of their community and must seek the sponsorship of a Cabinet Member for consideration. Further details of the fund will be made available in due course. The £500k highways investment fund will focus on improving the safety of pupils and parents travelling to and from school, by refreshing lines and cleaning and repairing signs in and around school zones. The funding is allocated for use within the 2020/21 financial year and looks set to benefit areas around many Suffolk schools, complementing the road marking renewal programme that is taking place as part of the move of civil parking powers. Suffolk Highways officers are developing a plan of how these extra works will be identified and delivered. Further information will be announced in due course. The setting of a balanced budget is never easy. Especially given the continuing financial challenges we have seen during the last few years in a number of our services. It is right that we continue to focus our budget and resources where they will have the biggest impact. I am pleased to say this year our calls have been answered, at least in part. The provisional local government settlement for this year enables the Council to set a budget for 2020/2021 that will see no change to current service levels over and above those planned through our ongoing transformation programmes. Unfortunately, however, as we are only getting a 12-month settlement, we lack the longer-term certainty needed to deal with the large departmental budgets that we manage including Children and Adult Services. We are therefore taking the measured decision to raise council tax by 1.98 per cent and implement a 2 per cent rise in the Adult Social Care Precept, which is ring-fenced for use within our highest demand service.

New street lighting proposed to reduce the county's carbon footprint

Suffolk County Council is looking to reduce its carbon footprint by investing £9.8m in street lighting, after Cabinet approved an LED street lighting replacement project on 25 February 2020. Following a review of its street lighting policy in 2010, and with energy prices set to increase at between 8% and 12% a year, the Council has decided the high energy consumption of its existing lanterns could create further pressure on its resources in the near future. The Council owns and maintains over 60,000 street lights. Back in 2010, the Council took numerous steps to help reduce both the energy costs and carbon footprint of its lighting stock. This included the introduction of part-night lighting arrangements and conversion to LED for those lighting units that were consuming the highest level of energy. The proposal to convert the remaining street lighting stock to LED will help to reduce both Suffolk's energy consumption and carbon footprint, whilst providing crisper illumination of the streets for residents. The project will also ensure that Suffolk remains resilient to any future energy price increases. The project will be completed in the autumn of 2022.

We recognise the importance of our environment in Suffolk and the impacts of climate change. Where possible, we want to ensure that we protect and enhance the natural environment, decrease carbon emissions and reduce the use of scarce resources for the well-being of future generations and the natural world. Initiatives such as this are important in helping us to achieve that aim. We will be replacing almost 43,000 lights with new energy-saving LED lanterns. This will save approximately 60% of our current energy bill which can be invested elsewhere. We will be able to reduce our carbon usage by around 80%, benefitting residents throughout Suffolk.

New permit scheme aims to address roadwork disruption

On 28 January, Suffolk County Council's Cabinet gave the go-ahead for a new permit scheme that they hope will reduce delays on Suffolk's roads caused by roadworks. The introduction of a roadworks permit scheme for the county's roads will give Suffolk County Council's Network Assurance Team enhanced powers to place conditions on work carried out by utility companies and other organisations, including Suffolk Highways. At present, public utilities simply need to inform Suffolk County Council of the dates when they are planning to do their works. Under a permit scheme, they would have to ask for permission and the council can either approve, refuse or amend their request as they see fit. Applicants would also have to pay a fee when applying for a permit to do roadworks. The cost will vary depending on the duration of the proposed work, the strategic importance of the affected road, and the time of day the work is due to take place. If roadworks occur outside of the peak congestion periods, the fee could be reduced. The permit scheme is used successfully elsewhere in the country and there is typically a reduction in congestion on the network. A permit scheme will provide more power to control proposed roadworks. It places responsibility on the applicant to better plan their work. I hope a permit scheme could reduce the impact of that work on the road network and our residents. A permit scheme should result in less disruption and less time that vehicles spend in traffic/delays. Consequently, there should also be a reduction in fuel consumption and greenhouse gas emissions. According to the Department for Transport, other counties that have run a permit scheme have seen a reduction in disruption and so we will endeavour to ensure those who live, work and visit our county also benefit. There will be a cost to the local authority to administer the permit scheme because they will need to recruit additional staff and amend existing software to cater for permits. However, the costs associated with the additional work involved will be recovered through the fee income associated with the scheme, making it cost neutral. The permit scheme will be in place from 1 April 2020.

Date agreed for plans to tackle Suffolk's parking problems

In January 2020, it was announced that councils in Suffolk will take on responsibility for local parking management from 6 April 2020. Traditionally, roadside parking offences were a matter for the Police. However, parking has become a lower priority for them, so Suffolk County Council is transferring this responsibility to local district and borough councils under a process known as civil parking enforcement, or CPE. This means each council will be responsible for issuing parking fines, warnings and notices in their area, although a deal has been struck by Babergh and Mid Suffolk councils to have their parking enforced by Ipswich and West Suffolk officers. A consistent approach is being planned across the whole county, meaning fines will be the same, regardless of which authority manages parking in that area. Councils already manage public car parks in many towns and villages, so the changes make sense. Suffolk Constabulary is supportive of the move because the transfer of responsibilities will enable them to spend additional time on keeping communities safe and arresting and bringing offenders to justice. Moving the responsibility from the police to local councils requires that statutory notice is given in Parliament. The parliamentary order was laid on 9 January 2020. Civil parking enforcement powers will soon sit with our district and borough councils across Suffolk. It is essential in enabling our communities to have closer management of their local parking challenges. A lot of residents come to us with concerns that people parking in their towns and villages are becoming more inconsiderate, and something needs to be done about it. We agree,

and as a result are committed to seeing these parking issues managed locally to ensure fair and safe parking for all. I very much welcome the cross-council collaborative working in order to deliver better parking for residents and those visiting Suffolk. Our colleagues will continue working together to ensure CPE is successfully launched and I look forward to seeing the benefits locally that these changes will bring.

Suffolk celebrates CQC success

In January 2020, Care Quality Commission statistics showed that Suffolk is now top of the table for comparator local authority areas. In Suffolk, 89.04% of Adult Social Care locations are rated as 'Good' or 'Outstanding' by the Care Quality Commission, the standards agency for adult care. When it comes to the national rankings, Suffolk is performing equally well. Ranked as third nationally for 'Good' or 'Outstanding' rated care locations, Suffolk shines out as a great area for adult social care. This is particularly impressive when it is considered that Suffolk has over 100 more adult social care locations than any of the other areas listed in the top ten. This is an incredible achievement and something that is worth celebrating. This to me, illustrates that Suffolk is a great place for Adult Social Care, with a wealth of care providers who do fantastic work. There are of course, still areas where we can improve and I know work is continuing to raise standards where it is required, but I am confident that we are working hard to address any concerns. These results make me incredibly proud and grateful to our care providers for the fantastic way that we are caring for local people. More information regarding the CQC ratings of local authority areas or individual care locations can be found on the Care Quality Commission website.

Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service rated "Good" in Government inspection

Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service has undergone its most comprehensive, independent inspection in many years and has been rated as "Good" for its effectiveness, efficiency and how well it leads and manages its staff. The findings come from a report published on 17 December 2019 by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS). Inspectors reviewed every aspect of the service, from how we respond to 999 emergencies, to looking at policies, and interviewing a wide range of firefighters and staff. The report praises many aspects of the service, particularly how well it collaborates with other emergency services and agencies, how it responds to fires and other emergencies, how it ensures fairness and promotes diversity, and the financially sound way the service is run.

The Hold topping out ceremony

On 25 September, contractors R G Carter, along with senior officers from Suffolk County Council, the University of Suffolk, Ipswich Vision and the National Lottery Heritage Fund, celebrated the official 'Topping Out' of the new 'The Hold' building. Located on the campus of the University of Suffolk, within Ipswich's unique and regenerating Waterfront, the building will house the majority of Suffolk's nationally and internationally significant archives. More than just a new building, 'The Hold' project will also be the engine for a transformed, audience-focused Archives service reaching out to diverse communities in Ipswich, the county and the nation, through its activity and digital programmes, engaging people in new and exciting ways. We are delighted to have reached this exciting milestone in the project's development. The Hold will not only transform our ability to care for and showcase our county's records and collections, but it will also engage audiences right across the county, bringing local and nationally significant exhibitions to all Suffolk Archives branches, state of the art research facilities and more access than ever before to digital collections. The Hold is set to open its doors later in 2020.

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