

## SUFFOLK COUNTY COUNCILLOR'S REPORT – FEBRUARY 2024



### *Cllr Stephen Burroughes - Framlingham Division*

- **MORE MONEY FOR ADULT AND CHILDREN'S CARE, BUT DIFFICULT DECISIONS ARE NEEDED**

In the next two years, Suffolk County Council needs to pump almost £74 million extra into protecting the county's most vulnerable residents.

- £74 million extra needed to protect the most vulnerable over two years
- £64.7 million savings to be made over two years
- Council set to reduce workforce, services and use savings

As part of financial plans to prioritise those in greatest need, an additional £42.7 million for children's services and £29.9 million for adult care are being proposed. Along with local authorities up and down the country, the council has been hit hard by inflation and rising demand for services such as children's care, special educational needs and disabilities and home to school transport. It means having to make difficult decisions about the services it provides, including £64.7 million of savings in 2024/25 and 2025/26.

The two-year savings proposals, which have been [published on the council's website](#) today, include:

- £11 million of staffing costs through changing the way services are delivered and restructuring across the council.
- £30.6 million of additional savings from an extension of the council's hugely successful Adult Social Care Transformation programme, which has focused on reducing demand for more expensive social care options by boosting people's independence and ability to stay well for longer through innovative methods including cutting edge care technology. This transformation programme has already saved £30.7 million over the last six years
- £0.5 million of savings by stopping core funding to Art and Museum sector organisations. To assist with the transition, £528,000 of COVID recovery money will be made available to Arts and Museum sector organisations for 2024/25 which will fully cover the funding reduction for one year.
- £140,000 of savings by centralising Suffolk Archives to The Hold and closing the branches in West and East Suffolk. In February 2023, the council committed £3.4m to relocate the West Suffolk Archives branch to the proposed Western Way development. Remaining at its current location would have required over £5 million to protect the historic records and meet modern archive standards. West Suffolk Council has since decided not to progress with the Western Way development, ending that opportunity. Centralising the three branches into one brings Suffolk in line with the majority of archive services across the country and is better value for taxpayers' money.
- £15.9 million of reserves will be used to balance the 2024/25 budget.

Following the recent funding announcement from the Government, Suffolk County Council will not receive enough funding to keep pace with inflation or the level of demand for services. The council has joined national calls for additional funding and lobbied the Chancellor of the Exchequer directly.

The proposals would give the council a budget of around £752 million for 2024/25, made up of funding coming from Government, business rates, charges for services and council tax. The proposed budget would require a 4.99% increase in council tax in next year. This would be made up of a 2.99% increase in general council tax and a 2% increase dedicated to funding adult care.

This means the costs for a household would be:

- Band B property: £23.50 per week (£1.12 per week increase from 2023/24) (Band B properties are the most common in Suffolk), Band D property: £30.21 per week (£1.43 per week increase from 2023/24)

- **COUNCIL TO ENSURE SIZEWELL C DELIVERS FOR SUFFOLK AS CONSTRUCTION BEGINS**

On the 15<sup>th</sup> January, Sizewell C triggered its Development Consent Order, meaning that work can now begin to build the new 3.2GW nuclear power station on the Suffolk coast. Suffolk County Council played a key role to get significant improvements made to the plans during the project's examination by the Planning Inspectorate.

As a result, Suffolk will now see around £250 million made available to its communities, by way of mitigating the impact on residents, businesses, the environment, and infrastructure. The council was also influential in ensuring that a far greater quantity of construction materials will be delivered by rail and sea, reducing the number of lorries on the county's rural roads.

During the construction of Sizewell C, Suffolk County Council will have a number of responsibilities, including:

- Discharge requirements (equivalent to planning conditions) to maintain control over highways, archaeology and flooding
- An important role in project governance over the construction period, in particular chairing the Transport Review Group
- Administering a significant proportion of funding negotiated during the examination and secured through the Deed of Obligation

The Deed of Obligation is a legal agreement between Sizewell C, Suffolk County Council and East Suffolk Council for the scheme to limit its impact on local communities during construction.

- **VISITOR ATTRACTIONS INVITED TO JOIN 'GOOD JOURNEY' SCHEME**

Suffolk Growth Partnership and Suffolk County Council have teamed up with the national organisation 'Good Journey' – the UK experts in car-free leisure – in a push to cut carbon emissions and widen access to our leisure, culture and nature for more people. The initiative, launching in March 2024, supports Suffolk's Greenest County journey towards a carbon net zero visitor economy and will welcome car-free visitors to an array of attractions across Suffolk.

Around 25 local tourism and visitor attractions are now 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. Suffolk visitor attractions participating will be supported and feature on [goodjourney.org.uk](https://goodjourney.org.uk) – providing easy travel information and discounts to domestic and international visitors.

Visitor attractions participating in the Suffolk Good Journey scheme will also form part of a marketing campaign showcasing sustainable tourism visits to Suffolk, offering adventures by train, bus, bike and foot to suit all ages and tastes – from exploring the towns, coast and countryside, and local food and drink delicacies to discovering the cultural and heritage attractions and film locations.

Visitor attractions and venues interested in joining Suffolk Good Journey county can find out more details by contacting Loretta Jones at Good Journey on [loretta@goodjourney.org.uk](mailto:loretta@goodjourney.org.uk) or [info@suffolkgrowth.co.uk](mailto:info@suffolkgrowth.co.uk)

- **FAKE UNIVERSITY WEBSITE SHUT DOWN BY SUFFOLK TRADING STANDARDS**

A website for a fake university aiming to scam money from overseas students has been shut down by Suffolk Trading Standards. Calling itself the College of Suffolk, the website claimed the university had been founded in 1990 and was located on Queen Street in Ipswich.

Quoting yearly fees ranging from £3,500 to £8,900, it claimed to offer courses in acting, musical theatre, dance and performance. The site used images of the real University of Suffolk and even had a page promoting the county, saying how it was home to its own breed of horses, breweries and famous celebrities such as singer Ed Sheeran.

A foreword by college 'President' Dr Stephen Spinks talked of how it provides "exciting learning opportunities in business, human resources, accountancy, finance, musician (sic) and art – all critical areas for the world of work."

It is the second time such a fake college has been foiled by Trading Standards – an identical scam using the same name and information was closed down in 2019.

The website was being run from Hong Kong and while Suffolk Trading Standards have had no reports of victims in the UK there may be some overseas.

Trading Standards says anyone considering applying for a college course can beat degree fraud through the Higher Education Degree Datacheck (HEDD) website <https://hedd.ac.uk/> where people can:

- Check whether a university or college is an official degree awarding body by using the look-up service
- Download free toolkits allowing employers, universities and colleges to tackle degree fraud
- Check original degree certificates with the issuing university

Degree fraud can be reported to the HEDD fraud team on 020 8148 2400.

If you have concerns about a website, please report it to Trading Standards via 0808 223 1133.

#### • **COULD YOU BE A PARENT AND CHILD FOSTER CARER?**

***A column by Councillor Stephen Burroughes, Deputy Cabinet Member for Fostering and Adoption.***

In this week's column, we are exploring parent and child fostering. It's a lesser known but incredibly impactful type of fostering and we need more people to consider if they could become parent and child foster carers. Parent and child fostering involves offering support and guidance to young parents, often mothers, who are facing challenges in caring for their children. This unique form of fostering aims to create a safe environment for both the parent and child, facilitating learning, growth, and the development of essential parenting skills. This week we are shining a light on Sam and Matt's personal journey with parent and child fostering, the challenges, the triumphs and why they would encourage others to become foster carers.

In 2009, Sam and Matt, parents of five, decided to start their fostering journey as they wanted to provide a loving home for children in need. A friend introduced them to fostering and they began doing short break placements, but their path eventually led them to parent and child fostering.

Sam, inspired by her own struggles as a young mother at 17, sought to extend a helping hand to those in similar situations. The lack of support during her early parenting years fuelled her desire to help parents that don't have anyone else.

Sam and Matt started by caring for a 16-year-old mum and her baby. Despite the hurdles, including an unsafe relationship, the mum thrived under their guidance. She became a part of the family and they have stayed in touch with her even though she has now moved on to live independently.

Over the years, Sam and Matt have navigated many more diverse placements, from supporting a mum with learning disabilities to guiding a dad struggling with his parenting skills. Each placement presented unique challenges, which is the diverse nature of parent and child fostering.

Despite the challenges, Sam and Matt say that fostering has brought great experiences and invaluable life lessons to their family. As a family they have formed genuine relationships with young parents and children

from different backgrounds which has taught them and their children empathy, compassion, and the importance of supporting others through difficult times. The challenges posed by fostering has brought the family closer together and made them more resilient.

Sam and Matt would wholeheartedly recommend parent and child foster care to others due to the difference you can make to both the young parents and the children involved. Despite difficult times, witnessing small successes and progress in the families they've supported has been immensely rewarding for Sam and Matt.

They feel that by providing guidance and empathy you have the potential to create a lasting influence on both the lives of the parents and the children whilst breaking generational patterns. We need more people to come forward to become parent and child foster carers. Foster carers must possess a blend of parenting knowledge, life experience, empathy, and strength. They must set boundaries, have honest communication, and a commitment to the parents and children in their care.

Training courses, staying updated on guidelines, and access to peer support are provided to our carers. This helps foster carers through the fostering process, ensuring that foster parents are well-prepared to provide a safe and nurturing environment for both parent and child.

If you are interested in becoming a foster carer, please visit [www.fosterandadopt.suffolk.gov.uk](http://www.fosterandadopt.suffolk.gov.uk) or call us on 01473 264800.

#### • **ACCESSIBLE CYCLING SCHEME LAUNCHED IN STOWMARKET**

The Way to Go Sustainable Travel team at Suffolk County Council (SCC) has launched a new accessible cycling scheme at Leading Lives Stowmarket Hub. A number of community groups from across the county were invited to attend the launch and see for themselves the range of accessible bikes on offer. Up to twelve adult bikes are available to loan for free, which is all part of SCC's drive to encourage residents to travel sustainably, especially for shorter journeys. This follows a survey conducted earlier in the year which asked community groups and their members for feedback on whether they would use accessible bikes. The responses were overwhelmingly positive and the scheme will now give community groups the opportunity to hire the bikes up to three times a week for free.

The 12 bikes - which include 4-wheelers, balance-supported bikes, a tandem option as well as a 2-seater with the seats positioned next to each other - will be stored in Stowmarket and are funded through the Capability & Ambition Fund from Active Travel England, an executive agency of the Dept. for Transport. The team hope that community groups will book the bikes and introduce regular cycle rides for their members and carers.

#### • **SUFFOLK PARTNERSHIP COMMITS TO URGENT IMPROVEMENTS TO SEND SERVICES**

The partnership responsible for overseeing and delivering services for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) in Suffolk have apologised to families and commits to urgent action to strengthen and accelerate improvement plans following an inspection by Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission.

- Ofsted and CQC Inspection Report finds significant concerns with SEND services
- The Local Area Partnership promise urgent action to accelerate and strengthen improvement plans
- Senior leaders offer joint apology to Suffolk families

The inspection, which took place in November, highlighted that 'there are widespread and/or systemic failings leading to significant concerns' about the experiences and outcomes of children and young people with SEND. The local area partnership which delivers SEND services is made up of Suffolk County Council, the NHS Suffolk and North East Essex Integrated Care Board (ICB) and NHS Norfolk and Waveney ICB. The inspection report, published January 30<sup>th</sup>, identifies two priority actions as follows:

1. The partnership should work more collaboratively and effectively to improve strategic planning. This needs to deliver systems with measurable impact that will create better experiences and outcomes for children and young people with SEND.

2. Leaders should cooperate to take urgent action to improve the timeliness and quality of the statutory Education Health Care plan process, Education Health Care plan needs assessments and Education Health Care plans and annual reviews. This should ensure that plans meaningfully capture the views and aspirations of children and young people with SEND and their families, so that they get the right support at the right time.

The local area partnership is now implementing a number of urgent actions. These include the proposed investment of £4.4 million into SEND services next year by Suffolk County Council (subject to Full Council agreement on February 15), and the establishment of a Suffolk SEND Improvement Board, which will be chaired by an Independent Chair, to oversee the improvement plan and actions needed. A new SEND Strategy is also in the process of being co-produced with parents and carers to set the strategic direction.

Alongside key priorities, the report identifies a number of areas where the partnership is working well. These include:

- In some areas, the local area partnership has worked successfully to improve services
- Strong levels of capital investment have increased the availability of special school places
- Initiatives to equip professionals in schools, such as the online tool to support schools, Valuing SEND or VSEND, are showing early signs of impact
- Several health teams support families sensitively and successfully, including the neonatal physiotherapy service
- Social care teams are effective. Social work assessments and reviews are comprehensive and helpful.
- Many providers, such as schools and colleges, praise their relationship with the local area partnership

As a result of this inspection, a monitoring inspection will be carried out within approximately 18 months. The local area partnership is now required to prepare and submit a priority action plan to address the identified areas for priority action.

The Ofsted and CQC report follows two years of significant investment into the way SEND services are delivered in Suffolk. Reform progress has been monitored by the Department for Education, who reported [in March 2023](#), that progress was 'reassuring' and noted 'the leadership's commitment to improvement in a wide range of areas'.

Significant pieces of reform include:

- Investment of more than £55 million to create more than 1,250 additional places in specialist and mainstream schools
- Creation of specialist SEND support teams and training for all Suffolk schools to support them to meet the additional needs of children in mainstream schools
- Proposed investment of £4.4m in 2024/25 and £3.4m in 2025/26 to expand our statutory SEND teams and secure sufficient educational psychology resource to improve the quality and timeliness of Education Health and Care assessments and reviews
- The ICB has invested £700,000 in recurring funding in the voluntary and community sector to provide support for families waiting for these diagnoses, as well as co-producing a new parent resource pack as part of the Suffolk Local Offer

For further information from my report or questions please contact me at:

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