

# Cllr Matthew Hicks 2023 Annual Report for the Thredling Division

## **Council to protect frontline services and increase funding in budget proposal**

Adult care services and children's services will receive £47m more funding as part of Suffolk County Council's £685m budget proposals. Despite an incredibly challenging economic climate, the council has been able to produce a balanced budget. This will protect the services that people rely on the most and continue to care for the most vulnerable, which accounts for 75% of the whole budget. Adult care services will have £34m more in their budget, and children's services will have a further £13m. This will help with the extra expense needed to meet the huge increase in demands for services, as well as higher costs due to inflation. The budget-setting has been achieved with input from the council's partners, officers, departments and notably, Suffolk residents. Over 2,600 local people contributed to an online survey and focus groups, asking where they would spend more money, spend less money, and their views on Council Tax. The top service areas where people wanted to spend more, were social care services for adults and children. Some of the service areas where people also said they wanted to see more money spent, will receive additional funding:

£700,000 for SEND services to support new recruitment, which is on top of the £1.1m invested this year

£500,000 for Highways: to use environmentally friendly weed treatments, and stop using glyphosate which can damage wildlife

£110,000 for tree management: to support the 'right tree right place' policy, having an appropriate inspection regime and supporting the resulting tree management requirements.

£45,000 for Citizens Advice: to support work during cost of living challenges

A budget gap for next year - the difference between what money is available and what needs to be spent - had already been identified, resulting in savings of £15.5m for next year. Under the proposals, the council's budget would increase by 9.6% (from £625.3m to £685.3). Additional funds would come from a total 3.99% increase in Council Tax, and an increase in funds from the Government for adult and children's social care. Regarding Council Tax, the proposed 3.99% increase would be made up of a 1.99% increase in general Council Tax and a 2.00% increase dedicated to funding adult care.

## **Historic half a billion pound devolution deal hands Suffolk regeneration & skills powers to level up**

A landmark devolution deal, which puts money and power over building, regeneration and skills into the hands of leaders in Suffolk will be signed today. Suffolk will be devolved power over their Adult Education budget, so they can shape provision in a way that best suits the needs of the local community and will receive immediate support to build new affordable homes on brownfield sites, as well as more capital funding to improve energy efficiency in houses. The deal will also see Suffolk County Council handed control over a £480 million investment fund – this will be guaranteed for the next thirty years. This will enable the county to drive growth and plan for the long-term with certainty as it looks to level up and unlock its full economic potential. Suffolk will also get a directly elected leader of the council. This not only provides a single person who is accountable to the people of Suffolk but gives the county a local champion who can attract investment and be a stronger voice in discussions with central government. The deal also sets out the government's plans to devolve more power to Suffolk County Council through:

**Investment:** It will bring decades of funding worth £480 million to improve the lives of Suffolk's residents and spend on their local priorities.

**Housing:** The deal will provide £5.8 million to regenerate brownfield land into beautiful, affordable homes and drive economic growth across the area; Suffolk will also receive greater compulsory purchase powers.

Education: The agreement devolves the Adult Education Budget so they can shape provision in a way that best suits the needs of residents and the local Suffolk economy.

Transport: An integrated transport settlement starting in 2024/25, to support the area to improve key transport infrastructure priorities.

The Environment: The new deal will help Suffolk deliver on its ambitions to be the country's greenest county with £3 million to improve energy efficiency in homes.

The deal is now subject to local consultation, a council resolution to change their governance model so that electors directly elect the council leader, and elements, such as the transfer of new powers, require parliamentary approval to secondary legislation. The deal envisages the election of a directly elected leader after May 2024. Subject to the passing of the relevant measures in the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill.

### **£2.5 million saved on energy costs as LED streetlight project nears completion**

A project with the aim of replacing all 43,400 streetlights across Suffolk with sustainable, longer-lasting, and cost-saving LED bulbs nears completion. It has saved more than £2.5 million pounds so far. The change to LED streetlights supports Suffolk County Council's aim to reduce carbon, light pollution, and bring down ongoing maintenance costs for the council, all whilst providing the best value to residents. It was expected that the council would reduce costs by around 76%, however, the target was exceeded, with 77.64% savings made to date. In June 2021, Bouygues Energies and Services were announced as the partner to deliver the project to upgrade 43,400 Suffolk streetlights with new, reduced energy LED lanterns. The total number of upgraded streetlights is currently at 40,692 excluding any of the Ipswich Borough Council, or Town/Parish council owned streetlights. There are approximately 1,700 upgrades outstanding, which includes any remaining heritage lantern upgrades. It is hoped that around 1200 of the remaining lanterns will be completed by the end of the year. Prior to the commencement of the project, Suffolk Highways contacted towns and parishes to provide them with the opportunity to have their parish-council owned street-lighting upgraded at the same time. All heritage-style lanterns are also being upgraded as part of the project. The upgrade of the lighting system will include a further rollout of SCC's central management system which will allow lights to be switched on or off and dim individual or groups of lights. This smart technology will increase the control the council has over its power consumption which will further reduce costs. The system will also automatically flag any lights that are not working which reduces the need for night-time inspections. The shift over to these new LED lanterns has enabled the council to save a considerable amount on energy costs and supported our organisation's ambition to become carbon-neutral organisation by 2030. I would like to extend my congratulations and thank you to all those working on this project and ensuring its resounding success. I look forward to seeing its continued positive impact in the coming years as we reap the benefits of stronger, cheaper and more environmentally friendly streetlights.

### **Next round of new SEND places agreed by Cabinet**

The Council's Cabinet agreed a new wave of funding to continue its programme to provide places for children and young people with SEND. The £3million agreement marks the start of Phase 3 of the Capital Programme to create three additional specialist units providing 42 additional places for students with special educational needs and disabilities. This follows Phase 1 of the programme which created 825 new places across Suffolk and Phase 2, which was signed off in June 2022, and will create up to 73 new places. So far, £45million has been allocated by Suffolk County Council to deliver the new places for Phase 1 and Phase 2 - £15million of which has been provided by the Department for Education. In addition, Cabinet also agreed to support the Department for Education's High Needs Provision Capital Funding (HNPCF) for 2023/24 of £7million to be spent on the development of units attached to mainstream schools to support students with social, emotional and mental health problems and speech, language and communication needs. This will create up to

168 new spaces, and is an addition to previous funding agreed from the Department for Education in 2022/23 for up to 78 new places. The third item signed off today was Cabinet's support for the application for funding for two free schools from the Department for Education. One of these will be in east Suffolk and support children with severe learning difficulties and the second will be built in Sudbury for those with autistic spectrum disorder and complex social, emotional and mental health problems. If the bids are successful, both schools will teach children and young people from across Suffolk. In total, Suffolk will deliver up to 1,317 new places for children and young people with SEND by 2025/26. We are seeing a continued increase in demand for specialist places for children and young people with SEND in Suffolk and it is vital we continue to stay ahead of this increased demand.

### **£7.8 million redevelopment of Foxhall Recycling Centre to begin**

Work on a major expansion of the Foxhall Recycling Centre near Ipswich is set to begin.

RG Carter Ltd has been appointed by SCC as contractor for the £7.8 million project. The new design will increase capacity for cars on site, reduce queuing and improve access from Foxhall Road, and provide greater capacity to meet future growth. The site will have a raised level construction, giving better access to the containers for users without the need for stairs. Containers can also be emptied without the need to close the site. The funding includes £794,414 from East Suffolk Council through the Community Infrastructure Levy collected from new housing developments in the East Suffolk area. Work is scheduled to complete in early 2024 and the site will remain open to the public during construction. The project will be conducted in phases to keep the centre operational throughout the build, but at certain times this may result in fewer booking slots being available to the public. The Re-use shop will change location in the new layout and will need to be closed for a period early next year to allow this to take place. The project will also see the installation of a feeder lane from Foxhall Road, making access into the site safer. Of the 11 recycling centres around the county Foxhall accounts for 19% of recycling and waste, collecting more than 12,500 tonnes a year. This is a significant investment in Foxhall recycling centre that will bring benefits to its users for many years to come. Whilst the centre will remain open during work this will be a complex project which will, inevitably, result in some disruption at times, so I would ask the public to be patient while improvements are being made. Foxhall is the busiest recycling centre in the county, so once complete this really will be a flagship site for Suffolk residents.

### **County Councils unanimously agree "no" to damaging pylons proposal**

Authorities in Essex, Norfolk and Suffolk have united to condemn the current proposals for a 180km network of 50m tall electricity pylons. The East Anglia GREEN proposal put forward by National Grid for a 180km network of electricity pylons between Norwich, Bramford and Tilbury. The councils agree that the plan for pylons is destructive and outdated, and will cause irreversible damage to the countryside, wildlife habitats and local communities. A new electricity network is needed to transmit the ambitious 50 GW of offshore wind that the Government aims to be delivered by 2030, and to connect new projects like Sizewell C. So much of this ambition falls on East Anglia, to provide energy for much of the country. The councils fully support the need to generate this renewable and low carbon electricity, to meet local and national Net Zero ambitions. However, they believe that more suitable, sustainable and modern alternatives for the network have not been properly investigated and presented, such as undersea cable routes around the coastline of East Anglia. Formalising their long-standing positions on the East Anglia GREEN proposal, the councils join a group of 13 MPs who signed a letter criticising the consultation, along with a growing public petition

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