

Parish Report September 2018

Councillor

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“Staying Close” scheme launched to support care leavers

Suffolk County Council have been awarded funding by the Department of Education for a three-year pilot scheme to support young people leaving care in Suffolk. The “Staying Close” scheme was launched on Thursday 9 August.

The aim of the scheme is to help young people from the age of 15 start planning for independent living with the assistance and support of residential care workers. This planning often only occurs close to the time a young person is due to move-out, causing unnecessary anxiety and distress. Early intervention and detailed planning from a younger age should help to alleviate this.

Young people will also continue to receive emotional and practical support from their children’s home and residential workers after they have moved out and started living independently.

The pilot scheme is being delivered in partnership with The Ryes Children’s Home in Sudbury, to test how this move-on care can be provided for young people who want to remain living close to their home.

Review into the Upper Orwell Crossings

On 1 August, Cllr Matthew Hicks, Leader of Suffolk County Council, launched a review into the cost of building the Upper Orwell Crossings in Ipswich.

The project is still in the planning stages, but an internal review of costs has forecast that the total cost of completing the Crossings could be significantly higher than the original calculation of £97m. The Department for Transport committed to fund approximately three-quarters of the original cost, but if the total cost increases it is unlikely that they will provide any more funding. The additional funding would therefore need to come from local sources.

Work on the project has been temporarily suspended whilst the review is undertaken, with an outcome expected by the end of 2018.

Reduction in recycling rates harm “Greenest County” ambitions

Recycling rates in Suffolk have dropped over the past 4 years, from 51% in 2013 to just 47% in 2017. Meanwhile, over 50% of waste in Suffolk is incinerated – much higher than the national average of 38%.

Although incineration may be a better option than landfill, it is still less environmentally-friendly than other methods of waste disposal. Furthermore, there are concerns that the level of harmful particles released by incinerators could pose a serious threat to public health.

The Suffolk Waste Partnership, as part of the Greenest County Partnership, set a target of recycling at least 60% of municipal waste by 2020. These latest figures suggest we are moving further away from this target. If Suffolk County Council truly wants Suffolk to be the “greenest county”, we need to start focusing on environmentally-friendly methods of waste disposal and ways to increase recycling levels in the county.

Tough decisions ahead as scale of Suffolk County Council’s budget challenge revealed

The scale of the financial challenge facing Suffolk County Council has been revealed, with the authority currently projecting that it will overspend by £8.6 million this year.

Based on spending on council services in the first quarter of the 2018/19 financial year, the county council is forecast to overspend its £501 million budget by 1.7%. This is unless the council is successful in reducing costs and making savings between now and 31 March 2019.

The overspend is mainly driven by rising demand for services and increased costs in Children and Young People’s Services, accounting for almost £5 million of the projected overspend. This includes services for looked-after children, specialist social care for children and home-to-school transport. There are also smaller, but significant, overspends in other council departments, including Adult Care and Corporate Services.

At the same point in 2017/18, Suffolk County Council also forecast an overspend of £7.8 million, which was eventually reduced to £5.2 million by the end of year following strict budget management.

Across the council, there are some big pieces of work happening to reduce spending and find new sources of income, including:

Adult and Community Services is strengthening its contract management to get better value for money

- The Children and Young People department is cutting budgets that have historically underspent
- The council’s passenger transport team is optimising routes and renegotiating transport contracts for hundreds of children to reduce the costs of transporting them to school
- Line-by-line reviews of budgets are taking place in Corporate Services
- Suffolk’s ten Transformation Programmes are continuing to develop and identify savings through reducing demand and changing the way we work
- Suffolk Fire and Rescue has begun a project to improve levels of staff absence
- The council’s major projects programme is being reviewed
- The council continues to lobby Central Government for more funding as part of its Fairer Funding Review.

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