

Generic Annual Report and News Highlights from 2015/16

Here is a short selection of the stories from Suffolk County Council from over the last 12 months. I have been updating Parish Councils on items throughout the year, some a bit long winded but there were some useful links in them for community groups.

- **SCC freezes Council Tax for sixth year in a row**

SCC's share of council tax is to be frozen for a sixth year in a row. This means that Suffolk residents will not pay any more than they did in 2010/11.

The council has had to make savings in excess of £170million since the Government's deficit reduction programme began in 2011/2012 and faces the need to make further savings of over £80million during the next two years. The budget passed in April saw a ZERO% increase in base Council Tax. The Administration decided to implement the 2% National Adult Social Care Levy to support the implementation of the National Living Wage. The budget for Adult Social Care and Children's Services increased. SCC has achieved its target savings and looks set to achieve next years.

I keep saying though it is not just about making savings, there is also a need to carry on being more commercial in our business. I am pleased that we have out-sourced and created businesses that are winning contracts outside Suffolk which will I believe benefit our residents.

As to building on our resources as of the end of this financial year a New Housing Company has been formed Barley Homes (Group). This exciting venture is a joint Company formed between West Suffolk Councils (St Edmundsbury and Forest Heath) and Suffolk County Council. This development company has been set up to build more homes within our Areas. This is another proactive way of not just getting more housing but also putting our finances to full use for the benefit of our residents.

In 2013 Suffolk Conservatives pledged that they would not increase Council Tax for four years if elected, and that manifesto promise has been upheld. The National Adult Social Care levy was implemented to help fund the National Living Wage.

- **SCC's Children's Serviced Department rated 'Good' by Ofsted**

Suffolk County Council's Children's Services has been rated GOOD by Ofsted following the publication of its inspection report on 15th February 2016. The report praises the work of the council in protecting and looking after children and young people, with some areas of outstanding practice highlighted in the report. The inspection was carried out between 23 November and 17 December 2015.

Suffolk now sits in the top 22% of local authorities in the country. 78 councils have been inspected so far under Ofsted's new framework. No authority has been judged outstanding and of the last 17 inspections across the country, just one authority had been judged GOOD, until Suffolk's rating.

Whilst SCC Children's Services meets its savings targets we are actually improving

the service that we provide. I would like to compare Norfolk County Council (which has similar demographics) has injected an extra £30m into its service and has consistently been rated 'Inadequate'.

- **Education attainment in Suffolk**

I am very pleased to report that there has been a 4% rise in the number of students getting five or more A*-C grades, including English and Maths. It means that 56% of Suffolk's year 11s got the expected level of attainment. The validated figure for 2014 was 52%. Suffolk's results have increased by 2.6% from last year's provisional results and see Suffolk rise 17 places in the overall league table, going from 124th to 107th

77% of 11-year-olds achieved level 4 or higher in their SAT tests in the three subjects in 2015 – up from 73% in 2014.

This closes the gap to the national average to just 3%. This is the third consecutive year the gap between Suffolk and the national figure has closed. Suffolk was 7% points behind the national average in 2012 - the results show Suffolk as the most improved local authority in the entire Eastern region, with a higher percentage rise than the other 10 local authorities in the area.

Suffolk has also improved in the national ranking and is now in 134th place out of 152. This is an improvement of six places from last year.

Progress in Writing between Key Stages 1 and 2 is another improvement. The percentage of pupils making the expected progress went up from 89% in 2014 to 91% this year. The percentage of children making expected progress from Key Stage 1 to 2 in Reading and Maths also increased – with both seeing a 1% point rise. In all three subject areas the increase in Suffolk was greater than the national rise.

The gap in performance between Suffolk's disadvantaged pupils and other pupils has also narrowed by 5% compared to a 1% increase nationally. I know residents were concerned when the SOR process was started that pupils would suffer during transition, so it is even more pleasing to report the above.

- **Broadband rollout on target**

A resolution has now been reached between DCMS and the EU which will enable us to spend our full £30m of public funding, as well as the monies clawed back from the first contract a total of £33.9m on Phase 2

Work on the Broadband rollout continues as we progress Phase 1 of the Superfast Extension Programme (the 2nd contract). The first phase of rollout will be shared onto a map on the SCC website, and the second phase will be added within the next couple of months. To date, we have enabled 35 cabinets, and reached over 3,000 premises under the Superfast Extension Programme, towards a target of over 1,000 cabinets, and over 50,000 premises by the end of 2019.

I did say that satellite connections were available but this isn't I will admit the greatest success in some areas.

For more information and updates please visit www.betterbroadbandsuffolk.com

I will give you an assurance that we will continue to hold BT to account to push the

rollout of Broadband across the County. This will become more challenging as we reach the final percentages in the most rural areas but this remains a priority for SCC.

- **Rural Transport Provision**

The changes to how Rural Transport is provided should bring a positive difference to communities, providing residents with a single phone number for each area. The whole county is covered so there are no longer any areas where there may have been gaps in service. We've worked hard on our approach throughout this service transformation, engaging with range of people and organizations including those who currently provide services. This has helped us develop these new service contracts. The people who have been supplying these services have told us what is needed, not the other way around. As part of this project, we took into account the needs of all residents who use these services to ensure there will be no issues with access, particularly for elderly and disabled residents.

This Service redesign has been built around the need of the users. It is another example of making a service better at a reduced cost. This smarter, more streamlined service will be easier to use and will allow users to have greater access to the public transport network in Suffolk.

I really believe that this is a real step forward as I have worked with bus operators in the past and have in fact chaired their meetings. The message I got was there are operators out there who are filling seats and providing an expanding service, this is what we need to build on.

- **£1bn Devolution Deal announced for East Anglia**

Last but not least Devolution, the subject that is most talked about at breakfast and dinner tables by Suffolk residents throughout Suffolk.....NOT!!!!!!!

Something is going to happen fact. I am of the belief and other Councillors feel the same way that it is best to be on the inside working rather than on the outside looking in. I just hope that real Devolution takes place and that more responsibility is passed down so that more "Local" issues can really be dealt with locally.

I have seen how "Locality Budgets" can bring groups together and provide real benefits for residents.

I have included below latest proposal ☺

The Government, Local Councils and the LEPs, working/deliberations has led to a proposed deal worth over £1bn for East Anglia. As part of the deal, announced by George Osborne MP, Chancellor of the Exchequer, East Anglia will receive:

- £900m (£30m a year for the next 30 years) to invest in infrastructure
- £175m to invest in housing

The Proposed Deal, which sets out a fundamentally different relationship between Government and local public services, was negotiated by Leaders from councils across Suffolk, Norfolk, Cambridgeshire and Peterborough and the New Anglia and Greater Cambridge Greater Peterborough LEP. The Proposed Deal would see

decisions currently being made by Government on such things as infrastructure, growth, employment and skills being made in East Anglia in the future.

The Propose Deal requires the creation of a Combined Authority and directly elected Mayor and it is proposed that the first mayoral elections would be in May 2017 alongside county council elections.

The directly elected Mayor would act as Chair to the East Anglia Combined Authority and would exercise the following powers and functions devolved from Government:

- Responsibility for a multi-year, consolidated and, devolved local transport budget
- Responsibility for a new Key Route Network of local authority roads that will be managed and maintained by the Combined Authority on behalf of the Mayor
- Powers over strategic planning and housing, including £175m ring-fenced funding to deliver an ambitious target of new homes

The new East Anglia Combined Authority, working with the Mayor, would receive the following powers:

- Control of a new additional £30 million a year funding allocation over 30 years, to be invested to the East Anglia Single Investment Fund, to boost growth
- Responsibility for chairing an area-based review of 16+ skills provision, the outcomes of which will be taken forward in line with the principles of the devolved arrangements, and devolved 19+ adult skills funding from 2018/19.
- Joint responsibility with the government to co-design the new National Work and Health Programme designed to focus on those with a health condition or disability and the very long term unemployed.

More information can be found here www.gov.uk/government/publications/east-anglia-devolution-deal

Terry Clements