

County Council Report 2014/15

- **Holding Council tax for fifth year in a row**

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

The council has successfully delivered savings in excess of £130m over the last four years. However, with the government's deficit reduction programme set to continue until at least 2018/19, there is a forecast of a further £120m budget shortfall that will need to be addressed over the next three years. The Council tax freeze was agreed as part of the budget proposals for 2015/16, which include savings of £38.2million, to be made across services delivered by the council during the financial year 2015/16. The bulk of these savings (£24.6m) will be delivered through wide-ranging transformation programmes which will result in the council becoming a leaner and more focused organisation. Over the last five years, there has been a reduction of around 47% in workforce numbers across council services.

- **Suffolk schools' ascent of league tables confirmed**

Figures out last month confirmed the trend of improvement in Suffolk's relative position in educational attainment.

In data released by the government in January, Suffolk has climbed 12 places in the national league table for GCSE results since the previous year; from 137th to 125th out of 151 local authorities. This means we are getting ever closer to bridging the gap between ourselves and the national average. This was always expected to be a tough year for results, on account of changes to the way GCSEs are measured nationally. As a result, there was a nationwide reduction in the level of results. In 2012, Suffolk had fallen 8.9% behind the national average at GCSE, prompting the establishment of the Raising the Bar programme. Since then, there has been slow but has shown improvement, with the gap between Suffolk and the national average narrowing to 4.6% in 2013, and now, following 2014's results, to just 1.7%.

- **Big improvements in early years and Key Stage 1 results**

The number of Suffolk's three to seven year olds achieving expected levels of attainment has improved significantly, figures show.

New statistics released by the Department for Education indicate an improvement in early years and Key Stage 1 attainment and, therefore, an upward surge in Suffolk's position in national league tables. Suffolk has made a big improvement of 10% in their Early-Years Foundation-Stage Profile (EYFSP). This means there are 10% more children in Suffolk achieving a good level of development in 2014 (59%) than in 2013 (49%). These results mean that Suffolk has now either met or exceeded national figures for Key Stage 1.

- **Suffolk first in the country to extend Better Broadband BDUK programme**

Plans to extend the roll-out of super-fast broadband to more households and business were signed and sealed last week.

SCC and BT signed a contract, under the Government's Broadband Delivery UK (BDUK) programme, to continue working together on the provision of a fibre network for Suffolk. The

project will use public and private funds to deliver a fibre network to parts of the county not covered by previous plans. The £15m capital grant from BDUK will be locally matched by £5m from the New Anglia LEP's Local Growth Fund and £10m from SCC.. As the service becomes increasingly available, people should use the 'Better Broadband for Suffolk' website (www.betterbroadbandsuffolk.com) to check to see if their home or business can receive faster broadband services.

- **Drive to create 5,000 new apprenticeships to address skills shortage**

A £1.5million campaign aimed at doubling the number of apprenticeships in Suffolk and creating thousands of new jobs and training opportunities for young people was launched last month.

SCC and the New Anglia LEP are leading the programme, and are calling on employers to help create the new apprenticeships that will secure the aimed-for 5,000 new opportunities by 2019. Increasing the number of apprenticeships will play a vital part in tackling the skills shortage in Suffolk and creating a more successful and sustainable economy.

- **Norfolk's waste to create energy in Suffolk**

The landmark deal between Norfolk and Suffolk has been honoured, and waste began arriving at the Great Blakenham site in September.

Both councils stand to make savings of around £1 million each from the two-year deal. SCC stands to benefit from economies of scale, because sending more waste to the EFW will reduce the treatment cost per tonne. These new savings come on top of the £8million a year that the EFW is expected to save for Suffolk's tax payers. The EFW was designed to handle up to 269,000 tonnes of waste each year.

- **Suffolk's blue-light partnership awarded nearly £5million in funding**

A newly-awarded government grant will help increase the number of shared bases in Suffolk for fire, police and ambulance services.

The grant of £4.94 million follows the submission of a joint-bid, led by SCC's Fire and Rescue Service, earlier in the year to the Department of Communities and Local Government. The national funding will be provided in 2015 to help establish more shared bases in Suffolk. The collaborative approach creates long-term financial savings for all parties and it will help the partners work more closely together in the community.

- **Stay Safe Scheme badges launched across Suffolk**

Suffolk's Hate Crime Service and partnership organisations have launched Stay Safe badges to help support vulnerable adults.

The Stay Safe Scheme was developed to enable vulnerable people to feel safer when out and about by providing them with places they can go to, should they need help or support. Suffolk Police has supported Stay Safe by producing more Stay Safe cards, stickers and funding the Stay Safe badge, which will help identify these vulnerable ones. Suffolk Hate Crime Service will be happy to provide advice and information on the scheme. A full list of Stay Safe Places can be found at www.suffolkhatecrime.org.uk or phone 01473 668966.

Hawstead Local Issues

As the Parish Council is aware I have two budgets for use in my Division, a Highways Budget and a Localities Budget not big budgets but does enable Councillors to deliver in their areas.

Last year I did commit to buying three Vehicle Activated Signs, VAS, I knew the ones the County had bought were insufficient to cover all of the County. Wasn't easy getting it sorted but hopefully you will see a benefit in Bradfield St George. Claire Starling has been co-ordinating their use and making sure the posts are in the right position in each Parish. Update on this is that a new Officer has taken over Hen Abbott, her email is hen.abbott@suffolk.gov.uk so on VAS she is the one to talk to.

From my Locality Budget I have supported SARS, Suffolk Accident Rescue Service, as I know Parishes have supported them in my Division and they are a worthwhile cause. I also gave a small grant to The Bury Society- Magna Carta to support the Workshop for Schools at St Edmundsbury Cathedral, several children were able to visit this while it was on show.

Thank you for your support during the Year

Terry G Clements