

Cllr Matthew Hicks 2022 Annual Report for the Thredling Division

Children's Services & Adult Care at the heart of Suffolk County Council's new budget plans

In December 2021, Suffolk County Council outlined how it plans to spend money on public services in 2022/23.

- More money to support children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)
- Extra resources for adults in need of care
- Additional funds to prevent flooding and fix footpaths

Under the proposals, the council's budget for 2022-23 would rise by 4.5% (from £598.2 to £625.4m). This additional money is generated by a 2.99% increase in Council Tax, and an increase in grants received from the Government. We worked with colleagues to propose a budget which will not see any reductions in our services, and invests further where it is most needed. Our aim is always to provide the best possible services for everyone in Suffolk and provide value for money. This has been a difficult budget to consider, particularly as Covid continues to make life challenging on every level, including our finances. We also continue to face rising costs and hugely increasing demands on our services year on year, particularly our adult care and children's services. But this is a budget which helps us to respond to these demands, and meets our priorities for next year. For example increasing our family services budget by £1.1m from next year, to specifically to address the recommendations made by the recent independent SEND review – this is in addition to our previous commitment of £45m to develop SEND provision."

Some of the detail of the budget proposals, includes:

- £1.1m increase for the family services budget, specifically to address recommendations made by the recent independent SEND review
- £1m additional funding for Suffolk Highways over the next four years, for example to fund road signs and responsible verge cutting
- £10m to specifically deliver an increasing number of drainage schemes (over the next three years)
- £10m to improve footpath quality and access (over the next three years)
- £12.8m to decarbonise the buildings that we own (by 2030)
- Investments this year to set up future borrowing for bigger schemes, such as SEND and carbon reduction

Regarding Council Tax, the proposed 2.99% increase would be made up of a 1.99% increase in general Council Tax and a 1.00% increase dedicated to funding adult care.

Proposing an increase in council tax is not a decision we take lightly, particularly when our costs of living are going up too. However, I think there is increasing recognition of the pressure our services are under. In our public consultation, there were more people who agreed that council tax would need to go up next year, compared to those that didn't. This was especially true for funding adult care.

New Suffolk Recycling Centres online booking system improvements

It was announced in September 2021 that SCC had developed a new, more user-friendly booking system which enables residents to book slots for recycling. For bookings from 27 September, people can view all available time slots in real time, to see which booking slots are free at any given moment. The system allows you to book up to seven days in advance. If circumstances change, you can easily cancel your slot up to one hour beforehand or equally, you can click to amend your booking if required. The system is also able to advise customers on which sites accept specific materials, such as plasterboard to ensure the correct type of booking is made to save customers' time, and it can also be used to share real time messages with customers, for example if any site needs to close due to adverse weather or emergency situations. The new booking system is connected to automated numberplate recognition to allow for a trial of automatic entry gates. Customer survey results show overwhelming support for the use of a booking system and the Council has gathered feedback from customers and site staff on how the booking system can be further improved, which have shaped the design of this new system. Through the use of bookings the council can avoid the frustration of long queues at peak times and increase the overall throughput and efficiency of the service for residents. During the pandemic, it was important that we managed access to Suffolk's Recycling Centres in a safe and organised fashion to ensure the safety of residents visiting to recycle their waste as well as that of our staff and contractors working on site. I am very pleased that sites are now back to full capacity and the new booking system will allow us to make adjustments to the system to make best use of all available slots at every site. The system has been developed with our customers in mind, with staff taking on board the views and comments received through regular customer feedback and interactions over the past year. Our site teams have done a great job in maintaining high levels of customer service during such difficult circumstances and as we begin to recover from Covid as a county. I am pleased to launch this new online service to help people access the services they need, when and how they want to." To make your booking, visit www.suffolkrecycling.org.uk.

Suffolk County Council's leaving care service receives high praise from Ofsted

In March 2022, SCC's leaving care service received high praise from Ofsted. Ofsted inspectors assessed the local authority's arrangement for care leavers as part of a focused visit to the service. The visit follows on from the Outstanding rating received by SCC's Children's Services department in 2019. The services for children in care and care leavers was the only area at the time to be rated 'Good' and therefore was an area of priority for the council. At the recent visit inspectors concluded that care leavers are successfully helped to transition to independence and reach their full potential. The service was seen to have a culture that is "determined, ambitious and creative" with practitioners who build trusting relationships with care leavers. Practitioners were seen accessing a wide range of specialist expertise to provide services to care leavers that are individualised and responsive. Inspectors also said that "Many care leavers achieve well, exceeding their own expectations. All are valued and their achievements are celebrated. Persistent efforts are made to reach out to those who are difficult to engage." I am absolutely delighted to receive such high praise from Ofsted. This report really demonstrates the hard work that staff in the leaving care service deliver day in, day out. I would like to thank them for the great work that they do for our care leavers. We are committed to delivering the highest quality service for our care leavers in Suffolk. All young people have the right to the appropriate level of support they need to aspire and achieve. I am committed to ensuring that this is the reality for all of Suffolk's young people, including our most vulnerable.

The full report can be found here: <https://files.ofsted.gov.uk/v1/file/50178373>

Halfway mark reached as over 20,000 Suffolk streetlights replaced

In February 2022 SCC's programme to replace 43,400 streetlights with new energy-efficient LEDs reached the halfway mark and to date, the teams have replaced 21,215 new streetlights with the new lanterns. These LED lanterns use less energy and produce a more natural and focused light than the traditional orange glow of streetlights. They are extremely long-lasting products and have an expected lifetime of up to 100,000 hours. This is approximately two times longer than a typical conventional street lighting lamp. As a result, SCC is expecting to reduce its annual electricity costs on the streetlights by around 76%, saving more than £1.7 million a year. This is 16% more than what was originally anticipated. The programme is on schedule to be completed by the end of May 2022, with all heritage-style lanterns being upgraded towards the end of the programme. Prior to commencing in towns or parishes, Suffolk Highways is contacting those councils in case they wish to upgrade their parish-council owned street-lighting at the end of the project. This is one of the many pieces of work we're doing to become a carbon-neutral organisation by 2030. The project will see a reduction in carbon emissions by saving energy, reducing light pollution as well as providing clearer images on CCTV, traffic cameras and dashcam footage for the benefit of public safety. A big thank you to all involved so far, and I wish the team continued success as the project progresses towards completion. Keep a look out for signs in your area to see where the teams are working next and follow [@Suff_highways](#) on Twitter for regular updates.

Independent review highlights failings in some of Suffolk's SEND services

An independent report into parts of Suffolk's special educational needs (SEND) provision was published on September 20th. This report has been written by a team from Lincolnshire, including Lincolnshire County Council and parent carer network. The review looked at processes, communication protocols and family-facing elements of SEND provision and was commissioned by SCC in June. The report lists strengths and weaknesses of the service and includes nine recommendations for improvement. These recommendations are now being worked through and implemented by SCC and other partners who help deliver SEND services. The review has found that we must change what we are doing in a number of areas. I would like to say sorry to any child or young person, and their families, who we may have failed. Our priority now is to implement these recommendations with pace, efficiency and impact. We have begun to make these changes, but it will take time before the impact of the changes are felt. We are grateful to the team at Lincolnshire for their findings and recommendations, which we accept wholeheartedly, and for their support and advice. SCC commissioned this review after the May elections because of concerns that our SEND services were not performing well. As we anticipated, the report has shown that SEND services in Suffolk are not good enough, and I want to apologise to those children and young people we have let down. I want to be clear that this report does not cover all SEND services and many children or young people who have specialist educational needs in Suffolk are very well served, but significant changes must be made following this hard-hitting report. We must learn from this report and implement fundamental change as quickly as we can. The review was commissioned following a significant increase in correspondence from parents and carers earlier this year. An Action Plan based on the recommendations is now being implemented. One of the recommendations made in the review was to work with a third-party organisation to deliver improvements. The council has since secured Impower as a strategic partner, who will bring capacity and extensive experience of working on SEND systems across the country. Other recommendations include staff training, reviewing the process for allocating specialist placements and working with education leaders and parents and carers to understand the demand for specialist provision and use data and local intelligence to inform sufficient planning.

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