

January 2022 report for the Thredling Division from Cllr Matthew Hicks

Children's services and adult care at the heart of Suffolk County Council's new budget plans

SCC has outlined how it plans to spend money on public services in 2022/23. 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. The proposals will be presented at a scrutiny meeting in January, then put forward for approval by councillors in February.

Councillor Richard Rout, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Environment said:

"I've worked with my 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.

The council's priorities are to:

promote and support the health and wellbeing of all people in Suffolk

strengthen the local economy

protect and enhance the environment

provide value for money for the Suffolk taxpayer

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. This means costs for a household would look like: Band D property: £27.60 per week (80 pence per week increase from 2021-22) and a Band B property: £21.47 per week (62 pence per week increase from 2021-22) (Band B properties are the most common in Suffolk).

Proposing an increase in council tax is not a decision we take lightly, particularly when our costs of living are going up too. 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. By paying this extra each week, we are all helping the council to provide its key services and helping support those who need it most. If anyone does have concerns about paying their council tax, they may be eligible for the Council Tax Reduction Scheme, which is managed by our borough and district councils. You could receive help if you are on a low income, even if you are working. The budget proposals will be presented at a Scrutiny Meeting on Tuesday 11 January 2022, with the final budget discussed at a Full Council meeting on 17 February 2022.

Over 10,000 new LED streetlights installed across Suffolk

On December 17th Suffolk's LED replacement programme reached a new milestone, with over 10,000 streetlights upgraded with new, sustainable LEDs. The contractor leading the programme has successfully installed 10,799 new lanterns and counting as part of the project to replace all 43,400 streetlights in the county. These lanterns use less energy and produce a more natural and focused light than the traditional orange glow of streetlights. The project, which is due to complete by the end of 2022 will also allow opportunity for other streetlight owners within Suffolk such as Parish and District Councils to upgrade their streetlights as part of this process. This upgrade supports SCC's ambitions for becoming a carbon-neutral organisation by 2030. The benefits include; supporting a reduction in carbon emissions by saving energy and reducing light pollution, as well as providing clearer images on CCTV, traffic cameras and dashcam footage for the benefit of public safety. Aside from the reduction in energy usage and minimising light pollution, the project will also bring down ongoing maintenance costs for the authority. SCC expects to reduce its annual electricity costs on the streetlights by around 76%, saving more than £1.7 million a year. By upgrading the lighting system with smart technology, this will increase the control the County Council has over its power consumption. 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 same time. All heritage-style lanterns which have been identified will be upgraded towards the end of the programme. This will go towards SCC's ambitions to become a carbon-neutral organisation by 2030. I congratulate the teams involved for their hard work and determination during trying times and look forward to seeing more of the county benefiting from these upgrades.

Show social care a little love this winter

In December SCC launched its first ever dedicated campaign about Social Care. The campaign is designed to help the public understand more about the Social Care sector in Suffolk, how the various partners and organisations work together to provide care for people, celebrate the amazing care professionals that work in the sector and ask the public for a little patience and flexibility as we all navigate through one of the toughest winters any of us can remember. Adult Social Care in Suffolk is made up of a close partnership of different organisations including local councils, NHS Trusts, and several private care providers who, when taken together, employ around 22,000 individuals countywide. On any given day the sector supports over 9,500 people to live independently for longer whilst enjoying their lives to the fullest. The sector faces considerable challenges however, including the recruitment and retention of key workers, the increasing complexity of care packages and the ongoing impact of the Coronavirus pandemic, especially on care homes, home care and front-line workers. To try and demonstrate how busy the sector is, everyday SCC's contact centre handles, on average, over 550 phone calls, webchats, or emails from people about adult social care. On Christmas Day alone, there will be around 1,200 care home staff working hard to ensure that the 5,662 people currently living in Residential or Nursing Homes in Suffolk get to enjoy a good Christmas. Then, on top of that, there are the 3,000 or so home care workers who will be out and about across Suffolk, offering help and support to people who are receiving care within their own homes. Please be patient when contacting any Social Care service. They are all working as hard as they can to provide essential support for people. I also hope that this campaign will change the way we think and talk about those people who have made working in Social Care their career and passion. These incredible people have made the choice to dedicate their working lives to the care of others. Whether social workers, mental health practitioners, occupational therapists, home care workers, care home and nursing home staff, and every other role I don't have space here to list - all of them, together, deserve our praise and thanks for the value they bring to people's lives, and our wider community.

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