

January 2023 report for the Thredling Division from Cllr Matthew Hicks

Council to protect frontline services and increase funding in budget proposal

Adult care services and children's services will receive £47m more funding as part of Suffolk County Council's £685m budget proposals, published in December. Despite an incredibly challenging economic climate, the council has been able to produce a balanced budget. This will protect the services that people rely on the most and continue to care for the most vulnerable, which accounts for 75% of the whole budget. Adult care services will have £34m more in their budget, and children's services will have a further £13m. This will help with the extra expense needed to meet the huge increase in demands for services, as well as higher costs due to inflation. The budget-setting has been achieved with input from the council's partners, officers, departments and notably, Suffolk residents. Over 2,600 local people contributed to an online survey and focus groups, asking where they would spend more money, spend less money, and their views on Council Tax. The top service areas where people wanted to spend more, were social care services for adults and children. Adult and children's care were at the heart of our budget setting last year, and are again this year. This is exactly what people told us in our public survey too, so we are all in agreement about investing more in these areas, and it meets one of our four ambitions for Suffolk - to look after people's health and wellbeing. This year, it's a case of being prudent across all areas of the organisation. Even though we have created £15.5m of savings, our frontline services are protected and receiving more funding. Alongside an increase in our funding from Government, and a history of excellent financial management at the council, I'm proud that we've been able to navigate our way through the extremely turbulent, economic waters caused by the Covid-19 pandemic and Vladimir Putin's illegal war in Ukraine.

We will be able to ensure that the services which mean the most to people, are still provided. Some of the service areas where people also said they wanted to see more money spent, will receive additional funding:

£700,000 for SEND services to support new recruitment, which is on top of £1.1m invested this year
£500,000 for Highways: to use environmentally friendly weed treatments, and stop using glyphosate which can damage wildlife

£110,000 for tree management: to support the 'right tree right place' policy, having an appropriate inspection regime and supporting the resulting tree management requirements.

£45,000 for Citizens Advice: to support work during cost of living challenges

A budget gap for next year - the difference between what money is available and what needs to be spent - had already been identified, resulting in savings of £15.5m for next year.

Under the proposals, the council's budget would increase by 9.6% (from £625.3m to £685.3).

Additional funds would come from a total 1.99% increase in Council Tax, and 2.00% Adult Social Care Precept. Our survey results tell us that people appreciate the need to increase Council Tax – 49% of people supported an increase, compared with 32% who didn't. We want to strike the fairest balance possible. We have produced a budget proposal which means we don't have to take as much Council Tax from people, as Government allows us to. This means a Band B property, the most common in Suffolk, will see an increase of 85p per week. The proposed budget will be discussed at the council's Scrutiny meeting on 10 January 2023, then presented at the Cabinet meeting on 24 January, with the final budget debated and voted on at Full Council on 9 February. [Read papers for the SCC Scrutiny meeting on 10 January 2023 here.](#)

Historic half a billion-pound devolution deal hands Suffolk regeneration & skills powers to level up

Suffolk will be devolved power over their Adult Education budget, so they can shape provision in a way that best suits the needs of the local community and will receive immediate support to build new affordable homes on brownfield sites, as well as more capital funding to improve energy efficiency in houses. The deal will also see SCC handed control over a £480 million investment fund – this will be guaranteed for the next thirty years. This will enable the county to drive growth and plan for the long-term with certainty as it looks to level up and unlock its full economic potential. Suffolk will also get a directly elected leader of the council. This not only provides a single person who is accountable to the people of Suffolk but gives the county a local champion who can attract investment and be a stronger voice in discussions with central government. With three new devolution deals signed in December, 50% of England will now be covered by a devolution deal and reaffirms the government’s commitment in the Levelling Up White Paper to offer a devolution deal to any area that wants one by 2030. The deal also sets out the government’s plans to devolve more power to SCC through:

- Investment: It will bring decades of funding worth £480 million to improve the lives of Suffolk’s residents and spend on their local priorities.
- Housing: The deal will provide £5.8 million to regenerate brownfield land into beautiful, affordable homes and drive economic growth across the area; Suffolk will also receive greater compulsory purchase powers.
- Education: The agreement devolves the Adult Education Budget so they can shape provision in a way that best suits the needs of residents and the local economy.
- Transport: An integrated transport settlement starting in 2024/25, to support the area to improve key transport infrastructure priorities.
- The Environment: The new deal will help Suffolk deliver on its ambitions to be the country’s greenest county with £3 million to improve energy efficiency in homes.

Levelling Up Secretary Michael Gove, said: “I said we would give devolution deals to all that wanted them and today we are keeping that promise by putting power into the hands of the people who know best what Suffolk needs so they can level up the county and unleash its full economic potential. It is now people in places like Ipswich, Felixstowe and Newmarket who will have a greater say on how their areas are run. Because we know important decisions are best taken by those who know their areas inside out, not by those many miles away in Whitehall. This new deal will empower leaders in Suffolk to shape policies and direct spending to address issues that are unique to them, and I will commit to working with them even further to help drive through that change.”

Cllr Matthew Hicks, Leader of Suffolk County Council, said: “This devolution deal is the first of its kind between the Government and a county council, making it a truly historic moment for Suffolk. The deal recognises Suffolk’s ambitions, would put more powers in the hands of local people and bring more than half a billion pounds of investment into the county. On the table are greater decision-making powers around transport, infrastructure, skills and more resources to help us achieve our net zero ambitions. Ultimately, this significant additional investment will improve the lives and outcomes of Suffolk’s residents. Devolution is a journey, not a one-off event. This deal for Suffolk is the first step towards an exciting future for our great county.

Keeping people in Suffolk warm this winter

“Suffolk Winter Warmth” provides items such as hats, gloves, scarves, blankets, duvets, baby sleep bags, hot water bottles, LED bulbs, draughtproofing and more, to households in need. Following a successful pilot in November, Suffolk Winter Warmth launched this week. The project provides support for any household experiencing hardship and in need of support to prevent ill health and keep warm. Residents can be referred by professional or voluntary sector organisations supporting residents who are struggling to heat their homes. These organisations include: District and Borough Councils, Health Professionals, Citizens Advice and Community Groups, Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service, Rural Coffee Caravan and more. The project is backed by £50,000 of funding from Suffolk’s Collaborative Communities Board and is co-ordinated on behalf of the whole county by East Suffolk Council. Professional and voluntary organisations can refer residents to the scheme by visiting: [Winter warmth referral » East Suffolk Council](#).

With the weather turning colder and heating bills rising, we know that many may need additional support to heat their homes this winter. Suffolk Winter Warmth will provide vital support to families in need of a little extra help to keep warm and avoid ill health. If you are struggling, please reach out. Information can be found on your local Council website. There are also more than 250 voluntary warm spaces across Suffolk, where residents can meet up with members of the community in a warm, safe space, at no charge. A map of warm spaces in Suffolk can be found on the Rural Coffee Caravan website: <https://ruralcoffeecaravan.org.uk/map/>

Alongside this, all Suffolk Libraries will act as warm, safe spaces this winter. Information and opening times for Suffolk Libraries can be found at <https://www.suffolklibraries.co.uk/>

If your community would like to set up its own Warm Space to support local residents this winter, guidance is available from Rural Coffee Caravan and Community Action Suffolk at: <https://ruralcoffeecaravan.org.uk/winter-warmth/#warmspaces>

Further details of cost of living support available for Suffolk residents and organisations can be found at www.suffolk.gov.uk/costofliving

Warning after children seen playing on frozen pond

The advice comes after a tragic incident on Sunday, 11 December, in which four young boys died after falling into an icy lake at Babbs Mill Park near Solihull. Since then, Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service has increased patrols at ponds, lakes, and reservoirs across the county to help highlight how dangerous icy water can be. Despite recent safety messages from the service, firefighters have still seen children playing on a frozen pond at a park in Lowestoft, with members of the public reporting that they had also witnessed children testing the ice near the water’s edge. An inspection of the pond revealed that the ice is only a few centimetres thick and liable to break at any moment. Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service was deeply saddened to hear of the incident in Solihull, and our thoughts remain with all those affected. We want to ensure that a similar tragedy doesn’t happen in Suffolk, so our crews have been visiting parks and other public open spaces to help educate people on the lethal consequences of icy water and put posters up detailing safety advice. It is shocking that anyone is still playing on frozen water despite the dangers of doing so being well publicised recently. I would ask that parents speak to their children about staying away from iced-over water. You may think that your child has more sense, but it is easy to give into peer pressure without thinking about how deadly ice can be. Further advice on winter water safety, including what to do if you fall through the ice, is available at www.rlss.org.uk/winter-water-safety.

Matthew Hicks - County Councillor for the Thredling Division

Tel : 01728 628176 Mob : 07824 474741 E-mail : matthew.hicks@suffolk.gov.uk