

Parish Report – Nov 2023

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Extra £10m Investment in Residential Roads

At Cabinet on Tuesday 7 November, we heard the details of the council's additional £10m investment in resurfacing urban and residential roads, which was announced in May after the local elections. The council plans to use reporting of poor road surfacing on quieter residential roads and cul-de-sacs where residents live to plot a programme of repairs from now until the end of March 2025. The opposition group also had a recent meeting with the council's new contractor for highways to discuss how works would be undertaken in future. The council's new highways contractor is called Milestone, and the new contract began on 1 October 2023. They will be picking up works started by Kier in the last few months of the previous contract and finishing them as soon as possible.

Budget Monitoring

Cabinet reviewed the quarter two monitoring report for the council budget at Cabinet on Tuesday 7 November, with a net overspend of £11.4m now predicted for 2023-24. Budget pressures for the year include placements for children in care, special educational needs (SEND) and adult care. The council is worrying overdrawn on its Dedicated Schools Grant fund, which will be at -£48m by the end of the financial year; this is because government funding for education is not enough to provide it. On the plus side, the council has predicted £7m more in business rate income than forecasted, and £10m of income is expected from the Energy from Waste facility at Great Blakenham from selling energy back to the National Grid.

Flooding Investigations and Repairs

Following the recent Storm Babet flooding around the county, Suffolk County Council teams have pumped away 4.7m litres of water, cleared 8,412 drains of storm debris and removed over 100 trees blocking roads. In addition to this, as the lead local flood authority, Suffolk County Council has a duty to investigate the causes of flooding and take action to prevent future floods, and have announced that £1m will be spent on investigating the Storm Babet flooding and improving the county's resilience for further storms and excess rainfall. Additionally, it will be administering the funding recently announced by the government whereby owners of flooded properties are able to apply for up to £5,000 to protect their homes and business from future flooding. Details of how to apply will be shared once they are known.

LionLink Energy Project

The council has submitted a second, extensive response to proposals for LionLink, an energy project which could see considerable impacts on Suffolk's coastal communities and natural environment. The council is opposed to the current proposed landing points at Southwold and Walberswick and has asked that better coordination be considered with other offshore energy projects like Sea Link to avoid unnecessary disruption to Suffolk communities and landscapes.

Libraries Consultation

The council is consulting on the new library service for the county as the contract with the current provider ends in May 2025. A consultation has been launched to gather views from residents about what they value about the current service and what they think should be developed, especially in terms of outreach and mobile libraries used in the county. If you would like to share your views, you can access the consultation at the following link: <http://www.suffolk.gov.uk/LibraryConsultation>

New Highways Contract for Suffolk Roads

At Scrutiny Committee on 23 November the opposition group had the opportunity to examine the new Highways contract with Milestone, which began on 1 October 2023. The contract promises better communication with councillors and Suffolk residents, and contains incentives for the new contractor to work efficiently – for example, undertaking other works needed in the same geographical area when they are called out. The committee agreed to review the performance of the contract in 12 months.

Suffolk Adult Care Rated Good

Suffolk County Council's adult social services were inspected by the Care Quality Commission (CQC) in August and September, and the judgement is that services are good, with strengths in safeguarding, leadership, use of digital technologies and the way SCC works with other local partners to provide care. Areas for improvement included equity in experiences and outcomes, and gaps in dementia and nursing care provision. Delays in getting through to the Customer First phonenumber – the main first point of contact for social care – were also highlighted for improvement.

Social Worker of the Year Awards

Suffolk County Council had a successful evening at this year's Social Worker of the Year Awards in London, including a Gold Award for Newly Qualified Adult Social Worker of the Year, and a Silver Award for the Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS) Team, who work to keep Suffolk residents safe where they do not have capacity to make their own decisions about their care and treatment. SCC children's services also won a Silver Award in the Children's Service of the Year category. Overall, the county council had six award nominations this year.

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