

Parish Report – Oct 2023

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Condition of School Buildings

On 7 September councillors from my group attended Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Committee to question council officers from the Schools Infrastructure team about RAAC, the schools in Suffolk affected and the support they are being offered. The agenda also included the process for building new schools in the county and how the council works with the Department for Education and housing developers to make sure there are enough school places for children in the county. The meeting also looked at the school admissions and school transport processes and ways they can be made easy for parents to navigate.

Suffolk County Council Overspend

At Cabinet on 12 September our group leader raised concerns about the overspend predicted for the financial year 2023-24. The council is forecasting a net overspend of £22.3m, which is 3.2% of the overall budget for the year and will cut into the council's financial reserves. Finance officers at the council had suggested a high council tax rise during the budget process to try and lessen the pressures on the council caused by rising inflation, energy costs and increased demands on council services such as placements for children in care, adult care and school transport for children and young people with special educational needs. The Cabinet agreed that senior leaders at the council would look at how money could be saved in each directorate to protect council reserves and prevent cuts to services wherever possible.

New Suffolk Fire and Rescue Control Centre

Officers from Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) joined Cabinet on 12 September to explain their recommendation that the council leave the current control centre partnership with Peterborough and Cambridgeshire and open a new control centre in the county by the end of 2024. This would create significant extra cost, but it was agreed that it was necessary for the safety of Suffolk residents. A vote was held and the recommendations were approved. My group were keen to ensure that no fire stations would close and there would be no cuts to jobs or changes to work terms and conditions, but no assurances were given.

Suffolk Youth Justice Service Annual Plan

The Cabinet meeting on 12 September also reviewed the council's Youth Justice Service's annual plan which requires formal sign off by Suffolk County Council as well as the national Youth Justice Board. The plan detailed recommendations from the recent inspection of the service by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation (HMIP) in summer 2022. The service are working hard to prevent criminalisation of children in Suffolk by keeping them in school, education and training, reducing the number of first time entrants into the youth justice system and working with the Suffolk Office of Data Analytics (SODA) to produce a disproportionality analysis of young people in the service: racial disparity, differences in school suspension and education rates, police stop and search and arrest rates.

£100k Fund for Net Zero Business Solutions

Suffolk's Public Sector Leaders group have announced a £100k fund to spark net zero innovation across the county. The 'Net Zero Innovation Fund' will provide grants to businesses for innovative solutions that drive the county towards its net zero target. The fund is being coordinated by the Carbon Charter, Suffolk's hub for sustainable business, and is part of a package of work to deliver the Suffolk Climate Emergency Plan, which sets out the shared ambition of a net zero county by 2030.

To find out more information and to apply, businesses should visit

<https://carboncharter.org/nzifs/>

SMEs (small to medium enterprises) looking for general help to decarbonise their operations can also access grants to support this as well as free business consultancy delivered by our partners Groundwork East: [Carbon Charter | Net Zero Business Advisor Service](#)

Successful Suffolk care leaver project rolls out across UK

A Suffolk County Council programme which supports care leavers when they reach the age of 18 has proved so successful, it is now being rolled out across the country by the government.

Staying Close, which was launched by Suffolk County Council in 2017, provides a package of support and guidance to young people leaving care. This includes ensuring they have accommodation, resources, and practical and emotional help to help them thrive as independent adults. This support is provided by a staff member who already works with them, so they have a consistent and stable relationship as they move into adulthood. The Staying Close programme in Suffolk is currently providing approximately 150 young people with help and support.

Primary and Secondary school applications are now open

Parents and carers can now apply for a place in the normal year of entry at primary schools and secondary schools for September 2024.

- The deadline for applications to secure a place at a secondary school is Tuesday 31 October 2023
- The deadline for applying for a primary school place (including infant and junior schools) is Monday 15 January 2024.

Parents and carers click here to apply for a place: www.suffolk.gov.uk/admissions

Before making a school application, parents and carers need to consider how they will get their child to and from school. School travel eligibility is based on a child attending the nearest suitable school that would have had a place available – this might not be the catchment area school: www.suffolkonboard.com/schooltravel

New highways and street lighting contractors

From 1st October our new highways services contractor, Milestone and the new streetlighting contractor, McCann have started work. This is the after several months of preparatory work with officers. We are hoping to see an improvement in service delivery compared to previously.

Cost of Living help and advice:

<https://infolink.suffolk.gov.uk/kb5/suffolk/infolink/family.page?familychannel=6>

Benefits advice and support:

<https://infolink.suffolk.gov.uk/kb5/suffolk/infolink/adult.page?adultchannel=0>