

County Councillor's Report for Lavenham Parish Council meeting on Thursday 4th March 2021

Suffolk County Council Budget

The Suffolk County Council Budget was voted through Full Council on February 11th. This year's budget is based on a 12-month financial settlement from government, rather than the 3 or 4 year agreement which is usually offered. Key points include:

- A council tax rise of 3.99% (1.99% basic council tax and 2% Social Care Precept), representing an increase of £53.55 for a Band D property, from £1,343.61 in 2020-21 to £1,397.16 in 2021-22.
- A council tax income forecast to be £7.9m lower than usual, to be met by using reserves.
- Planned spending is £597.9m, 7.4% more than 2020-21.
- £15.3m of spending to address ongoing COVID-19 costs.
- No proposed reductions in council services or personnel.

Green Budget Amendment voted down

My political group submitted an amendment to the administration's budget. This would have authorised the use of the full 3% social care precept to avoid impacting SCC's reserves and generate an extra £3.45m for social care at a cost of only £13.41 per year to a Band D household. The extra income would have provided funding for a wider service offer for Suffolk residents, including a new officer for the flooding team to unlock more government funding, and the re-enablement of concessionary bus passes on community transport. The amendment was unfortunately not passed.

Up to 10 year delay to flood repairs

It has emerged from a report to the Suffolk Flood Risk Management Scrutiny subcommittee on 3rd March, that funding restrictions meant it would take highways ten years to repair all the highways flooding issues currently on its list. County Council has been told it will receive £27m from Government for highways repairs, maintenance and drainage in 2021-22, a reduction from £31m the previous year. This has necessitated the use of £2m of reserves to top up the grant. In the past settlements have been agreed several years ahead but the government is currently deciding year by year. This makes it impossible to plan long-term for road maintenance and repair.

Suffolk & Norfolk County Council submit joint bid for £6m flood funding

Suffolk and Norfolk County Councils have submitted a joint bid to the £200m fund for Flood and Coastal Resilience, requesting £6m to invest in flood protection schemes across both counties. The proposed projects would also capture water for reuse. If the bid is successful town and parish councils will be encouraged to get involved through measures like permeable paving, water butts and 'rain gardens' that can cope with occasional flooding. These projects would be in place by 2027 if the bid is approved.

Changes to Post-16 Travel Policy

My political group submitted a joint response to Suffolk County Council's consultation (now closed) on transport to schools and education for over 16s.

- Support for the expansion of the post-16 travel eligibility for sixth form students and adult learners aged 25 and under with Education, Health and Care plans, reflecting the change in age range for compulsory school attendance.
- Support for keeping prices lower for SEND students.
- The school transport service should support our local bus network in maintaining services to rural areas.
- Better funding for the Travel Training Scheme which trains SEND students to use buses and trains where possible rather than taxis and private cars to reach their schools.

Suffolk moves school bus contracts from Norse to Vertas

School buses have been run since 2013 by Suffolk Norse, a joint venture in which Suffolk has a 20% stake. However, Suffolk Norse went into losses in the last two years and has handed notice in on the contract. Suffolk cabinet decided on 23 February to move the contract inhouse by handing it to its wholly owned company Vertas.

The 40 home-to-school transport routes and a school swimming service will be delivered by Vertas from September onwards. The move does mean the county can look at replacing diesel with electric vehicles as the technology becomes viable to help meet its zero carbon by 2030 commitment.

Unsuitable for HGV signs - Bridge Street Road

I have agreed to fund these new signs at the entrance to the road on Church Street, Lavenham and by the A134 at the other end of the road following residents' complaints of lorry noise. They should be installed in the coming weeks.

R LINDSAY
MARCH 2021