March 2022 report for the Thredling Division from Cllr Matthew Hicks

Council focuses on children's services, adult care and the environment, as budget confirmed
Suffolk County Council has approved its financial budget for 2022-23, alongside its first-ever full Net Zero carbon budget. Both items were passed at the Full Council meeting on Thursday 17 February 2022, providing a focus on children's services, adult care and the environment.
The council's budget will rise by 4.5% (from £598.2m to £625.4m), with the additional money generated by a 1.99% increase in council tax, a further 1.00% from the Adult Care Precept, and an increase in grants received from the Government. The Net Zero carbon budget will allow the council to measure its carbon emissions, and monitor and evaluate the impact of decisions it makes. This will mean it can report each year on its progress, tracking its ambitions towards Net Zero. This was the first time the council chamber has witnessed a financial budget and a carbon budget being approved. It is important to give our Net Zero Carbon Budget equal weighting to our financial budget – it highlights our commitment to responding to our climate emergency declaration. Our financial budget means will not see any reductions in our services, and we're further investing where it is most needed. Our aim is always to provide the best possible services for everyone in Suffolk and provide value for money. SCC had the option to increase the adult care element of council tax by a further 1%, but decided against this. We recognise Suffolk residents are seeing increases in the cost of living, whether at the supermarket, on the high street, and of course with energy bills. We did not feel it right to ask everyone for even more from their council tax bill - there is a balance to be had. We have been facing huge challenges, particularly the increase in demand on children service's and adult care. But we are confident that our budget addresses these challenges without the need to ask even more from our residents. The Net Zero Carbon Budget will enable the council to more accurately measure its progress to being Net Zero by 2030, and how it can reduce its carbon emissions. Some of the detail of the budget, 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 SCC owns (by 2030)

75p of every £1 Suffolk County Council spends goes towards supporting those who need it most through Adult Care, Children's Services, and Public Health. The remaining 25p in every £1 is then used to cover the cost of other vital services, including Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service, road maintenance, footpaths, waste services, libraries and addressing the challenges surrounding climate change, to name just a few.

Residents urged to support Suffolk spectacular
Suffolk is set to stage a host of exciting Jubilee celebrations during 2022 – bringing the county's communities together to mark this momentous milestone. Her Majesty The Queen will become the first ever British Monarch to celebrate a Platinum Jubilee, on Sunday 6 February, after 70 years of service. The unprecedented anniversary will be celebrated throughout the year, with a four-day UK bank holiday taking place from Thursday 2 to Sunday 5 June to enable people to commemorate the occasion. Plans are already in place for a Festival of Suffolk – the county's biggest ever community event. This year-long spectacular will incorporate much-loved existing events, such as the Suffolk Show, alongside dedicated Jubilee celebrations, including a race day and torch relay. Details on the latest line-up can be found at: www.festivalofsuffolk.org/.

Good news for Suffolk Government gives the green light to negotiate a County Deal

Leader of Suffolk County Council, Councillor Matthew Hicks, on February 8th, explained why a new county deal is good for Suffolk, and why we don't need a new Mayor. He said: In August last year, I wrote about the efforts of Suffolk's Public Sector Leaders in working to secure from the Government a devolution deal for Suffolk. Last week, at the same time as the publication of the Levelling Up White Paper, we heard the news that Suffolk was successfully chosen as one of nine areas across the country to have been given the opportunity of negotiating a new County Deal. This is fantastic news for Suffolk, and I am delighted about it. One of the questions I've heard a lot since the announcement is, what would a deal mean for Suffolk? To clarify we do not have a deal yet, and we have many more months of negotiations and discussions with Government ahead of us before we can look to finalise an actual deal. Some of the areas we included in our initial discussion centred around the development and roll out of Oyster style travel cards to increase the attractiveness and effectiveness of public transport and longer term funding for major transport infrastructure upgrades, not just one-off funding. We also discussed with Government the opportunity of keeping all the apprenticeship levy funding raised in Suffolk in Suffolk, benefiting more people here. This could create the opportunity to work with the University, colleges, business and others to explore how this money could be better used. Negotiating the devolution of the powers necessary to develop more innovative projects to help deliver further action on Climate Change and make good on our promises around net zero by 2030 are also possible. Whilst I was delighted to read the other day that in a recent study Suffolk County Council was ranked as the third-best county council nationally for our response to the climate crisis, our ambitions in this area could be taken further still via a County Deal. What I can promise you, however, is that during the negotiations I will be pushing the Government for the maximum amount of benefit for the people of Suffolk. Finally, one of the areas related to this announcement which gained a lot of attention, especially from the media, was the potential for a directly elected Mayor of Suffolk, like the Metropolitan Mayors across the country in areas like the West Midlands. To be clear this is not something which Suffolk has asked for and importantly not something we need to secure a deal with Government. I have always been ambitious for Suffolk, and I believe the opportunities within a County Deal would help unlock more potential in Suffolk and help us level up across the county; especially as we start to slowly escape the clutches of COVID. We will negotiate hard for a deal that will give us the tools we need to build back better, build back stronger and build back greener.

Halfway mark reached as over 20,000 Suffolk streetlights replaced

It was announced on February 16th that Suffolk County Council's programme to replace 43,400 streetlights with new energy-efficient LEDs has reached the halfway mark. To date, the teams have replaced 21,215 new streetlights with the new lanterns and are well on the way to successfully delivering the project on budget and to programme timescales. These LED lanterns use less energy and produce a more natural and focused light than the traditional orange glow of streetlights. They are extremely long-lasting products and have an expected lifetime of up to 100,000 hours. This is approximately two times longer than a typical conventional street lighting lamp. As a result, Suffolk County Council is expecting to reduce its annual electricity costs on the streetlights by around 76%, saving more than £1.7 million a year. This is 16% more than what was originally anticipated. The programme is on schedule to be completed by the end of May 2022, with all heritage-style lanterns being upgraded towards the end of the programme. 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 end of the project. The project will see a reduction in carbon emissions by saving energy, reducing light pollution as well as providing clearer images on CCTV, traffic cameras and dashcam footage for the benefit of public safety

Suffolk Fostering and Adoption Service swoops into The Big Hoot

Suffolk Fostering and Adoption Service has been announced as a proud sponsor for Suffolk's biggest ever mass participation public art event – 'The Big Hoot'. The Big Hoot Ipswich 2022 is the third art trail brought to Ipswich by St Elizabeth Hospice in partnership with creative producers Wild in Art, following the success of Pigs Gone Wild 2016 and Elmer's Big Parade Suffolk 2019. As part of the Big Hoot 2022, 50 ornately decorated owl sculptures, featuring designs celebrating all things Suffolk, will be scattered throughout Ipswich showcasing the wealth of artistic talent of the county and beyond, as part of the biggest free art event in Suffolk which attracts hundreds of thousands of visitors to the town. In addition to The Big Hoot, Suffolk Fostering and Adoption Service will take part in the Little Hoot. The Little Hoot is predominantly aimed at schools who design their owl and fundraise for St Elizabeth's hospice. I'm delighted that Suffolk Fostering and Adoption are participating in The Big Hoot to raise awareness of the fantastic work our foster carers and adopters provide for Suffolk children in the local community. We also hope that through a range of competitions and fun activities surrounding the event it will help us with our urgent need to attract more foster carers and adopters in Suffolk. Suffolk's children and young people's service currently have over 850 children in care and with more children coming into care in Suffolk every year, the need for foster carers and adoptive parents to come forward has never been greater. These children need someone who can understand what they have been through, look at the world through their eyes and provide warmth, consistency and emotional support. To find out more about fostering or adopting in Suffolk, visit: www.suffolk.gov.uk/fosteringandadoption or call 01473 264800.

Suffolk cements commitment to keeping its communities safe

A new strategy was announced on February 7th outlining how Suffolk will address Violence Against Women and Girls. The strategy has been prepared collaboratively by the Safer Stronger Communities Board (SSCB) – consisting of representatives from SCC, district and borough councils, the police, Suffolk's Police & Crime Commissioner, community safety partnerships, health and probation services, the Norfolk & Suffolk Criminal Justice Board and Suffolk Safeguarding Partnership. All board members hold a shared ambition to tackle the incredibly important issue of Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) which includes, but is not limited to, domestic abuse, sexual violence, stalking, coercive and controlling behaviour, and revenge porn – all of which have a devastating impact on victim-survivors, families, and communities. Much work has been done on preventing VAWG since the launch of the county's first strategy in 2018, which led to the establishment of Suffolk's 24/7 domestic abuse helpline, additional accommodation for survivors and the creation of a Domestic Abuse Perpetrators Unit to help offenders address and alter their behaviour. However, with recent figures showing an increase in sexual offences and domestic violence nationally, the board recognises the need to continue to drive forward positive change through effective partnership working. Suffolk's new VAWG Strategy outlines how this will be achieved in the county, with four key objectives – prevention, supporting victims, pursuing perpetrators, and strengthening the system – forming the basis for its approach. This has been informed by members of the board, local charities, and domestic abuse survivors – who praised the system for enabling them to co-create proposals and have their say. To support the board in implementing both the strategy and action plan, Suffolk County Council has contributed £350,000 towards this. Although Suffolk remains a safe place to live and work for many, crimes against women and girls are still happening daily, with these often underpinned by outdated attitudes and prejudice. We will not stop until every woman and girl in Suffolk feels safe in their community or at home.

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