

Parish Report November 2018

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Highways Improvement and Innovation Board – new approach to pothole repairs, coordinating road closures and working with parish councils

A Highways Improvement and Innovations Board was established in June and has met three times. The Board recently announced that Suffolk Highways will be piloting a new approach to prioritising pothole repairs over the winter, specifically for services coming out of the Ipswich Phoenix House depot. If successful, the new approach will be rolled out to other depots.

The new approach will mean more potholes in a single area will be repaired together, and potholes of 200mm width will also be included.

The pilot aims to tackle more potholes at once, rather than later returning to the same area to repair nearby potholes. It will also aim to reduce the number of temporary repairs, which also have to be returned to at a later date. This should reduce the travelling time of maintenance crews, and result in more potholes being filled.

The Board has also been looking into improving the coordination of road closures, reducing the number of roadworks which overrun, and exploring ways for Suffolk Highways to work closer with town and parish councils. A progress report from the Board is expected at Scrutiny later in the year.

Second Suffolk children’s home judged “inadequate”

A children’s home run by Suffolk County Council has been judged “inadequate” by Ofsted, following an inspection on 3 October 2018. This is the second council-run children’s home to receive an inadequate rating in the past 2 months.

Ofsted expressed particular concern over unsafe behaviour management techniques used by staff in the home, and noted a significant increase in the number of physical interventions.

Council signs up to 100% nuclear energy deal

At the Council meeting on 18 October, members of my political group put forward a motion calling on the Council to recognise the benefits of renewable energy, commission a report into smart grids, and commit to ensuring at least 50% of the Council’s energy comes from renewable sources by 2025. Unfortunately, the Conservative administration amended the motion to remove any clear actions or targets.

It was also revealed that the Council have recently signed off on a 100% nuclear energy deal for the next three years, to commence in March 2019. This represents a major step backwards for Suffolk County Council, whose current energy contract includes 18.7% renewables.

No funding to help end period poverty

The Labour Group proposed a motion to Council on 18 October, asking for a commitment of £15,000 in the budget to help tackle “period poverty”. Many girls suffer and frequently miss school because they are unable to afford sanitary products. The motion therefore asked the Council to fund free sanitary products in all local authority maintained schools in Suffolk, and to encourage academies to implement similar measures.

Unfortunately, the Conservative administration once again amended the motion, removing all funding commitments. It was claimed that this was because the level of funding in the original motion was too small and unfairly favoured girls at maintained schools. However, a later amendment from my political group, which proposed increasing the funding commitment in the motion to include all schools in Suffolk, was rejected.

New Home Care operating model

At Cabinet on 9 October a new Home Care operating model was agreed. It was acknowledged that the previous model had not been a success and had caused unnecessary stress to both care providers and residents receiving home care. We were assured that “lessons had been learned” from this previous experience, and that greater care had been taken to develop the operating model in partnership with stakeholders.

A call-in of the decision was received and so the model received further scrutiny from the Council’s Scrutiny Committee. However, the majority of the Scrutiny Committee voted to proceed with the new model rather than asked Cabinet to reconsider their decision.

Budget consultation and reduction in overspend

Suffolk County Council is currently consulting on the 2019/20 budget and is asking the public to share their ideas for potential savings. The consultation runs until 5pm on Friday 16 November, and can be found at: <https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/consultations-petitions-and-elections/consultations/a-tough-call-to-make-budget-20192020/>. We will get our first look at the 2019/20 budget proposals on Thursday 22 November, when they are presented to the Scrutiny Committee.

At the end of Quarter 1 the council was predicting an overspend on the 2018/19 net budget of £8.6m. This prediction has now reduced, at the end of Quarter 2, to a £7.5m overspend. Although an improvement, it is unlikely that the overspend will be reduced completely by the end of the financial year, and the council will still need to make use of reserves to cover the funding gap.

School admissions consultation

Suffolk County Council is consulting on its school admissions policy for 2020/21, available at: <https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/children-families-and-learning/schools/school-places/consultation-on-admissions-to-schools-in-suffolk-for-the-20202021-school-year/>. The consultation is open until 12 November 2018.

No significant changes are proposed for 2020/21. However, the council are also seeking views on potential future changes to the oversubscription criteria, in terms of the removal of catchment area priority. If they decide to progress with this change, there would be another consultation October 2019 and any changes would then apply from 2021/22.