

Date: 8/7/21
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Report for July 2021 to Parish Councils Peninsula Division from Simon Harley (SCC Councillor)

Review of SEND provision

Suffolk County Council has commissioned an immediate independent review into Special Educational Needs and Disability provision. There has been a lot of concern expressed by parents and carers about this area of service, with high levels of dissatisfaction being publicised, particularly through the group Campaign for Change (SEND Suffolk).

A multi-agency team from Lincolnshire will carry out an independent review into the way parents and carers are communicated with and kept informed of their child's SEND provision in Suffolk.

The review will focus on the processes, communication protocols and family-facing elements of SEND services within Suffolk County Council. It will not look at specific cases or the provision given to specific children. The review started in June and will be completed within six weeks. The report, with any recommendations, will be published on Suffolk County Council's website, shared with those who contributed to it and also scrutinised, in public, by the council's Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Committee.

Highways: Overgrown paths and footways, potholes

After extra rainfall, the last month or so has seen exuberant growth of foliage alongside roads and paths. Staff and contractors are out and about cutting footpaths and verges but are playing catch-up. If there are particular problems these can be reported through the online highways reporting tool: <https://highwaysreporting.suffolk.gov.uk/> or contact me directly as has been done in many cases already.

A number of significant road repairs have been done recently but potholes continue to be reported. This is an area where SCC has significant budget constraints and often does not have the funds to do the repairs that residents would like to see. The Council is seeking a better highways funding settlement from central government, as well as reviewing its contract with Kier which expires September 2023.

Boundary Commission Review: Suffolk parliamentary constituencies

This review seeks to regularise the size of constituencies across the country, the proposals are for a significant re-shaping of the current Suffolk constituencies. The boundary commission are consulting on their initial proposals for an eight-week period, from 8 June 2021 to 2 August 2021. They encourage everyone to use this opportunity to help shape the new constituencies – the more responses received, the more informed their decisions will be when considering whether to revise our proposals. The consultation portal at www.bcereviews.org.uk has more information about their proposals and how to give your views on them.

Bus Back Better

This initiative by central government is essentially a reaction to Covid 19, but on closer inspection it may lead to re-regulation of bus services - which could be a positive move for rural Suffolk.

The de-regulated services we have at present have led to the decimation of rural services, as this policy makes it unlawful to cross subsidise routes, i.e., if an operator makes profit on a busy route, they cannot use that money to subsidise a loss-making route elsewhere. This policy was originally aimed at cities and towns where multiple operators were competing, this was never a problem in rural areas. Re-regulation will mean that an operator can cross-subsidise once again, this should allow for greater choice and service to our rural community.

The offer from government asks for a plan from participating authorities, to bid into a central pot, to help fund not only this renewal of services, but also government are offering 4000 zero emission electric buses that can also be bid for.

We have asked the conservative administration how many of these zero emission buses will we secure for Suffolk, I am disappointed they would not commit to any number, as the small print in the government offer asks for up to 30% of the cost of each Bus bid for. With this being the case, it is highly likely that the most of these buses will end up in a large town or city. On a population split, Suffolk ought to be able to secure 40 of these Buses, if they were focussed in say Ipswich or Lowestoft, we could radically reduce emissions as well as encourage much needed “modal shift” in transport.

I have also just had a press release which you may find of interest:

Leaders earmark major investment as part of Suffolk taking its first steps on road to Covid recovery

Suffolk Public Sector Leaders (SPSL) has today approved a significant investment of £6.238m towards a range of strategic, community focussed projects and programmes that support efforts in Suffolk’s long term recovery beyond the Covid-19 pandemic. This money will be used to increase the offer for young people and families, to improve access to housing, to help local businesses get back on track, to address the climate emergency commitment and to drive future public engagement plans.

Combined with investments previously made last September, this means SPSL has invested a total of £9.788m to support Suffolk’s longer term recovery from Covid-19 in the key areas of economic growth, supporting communities, community safety, tackling climate change, housing and in listening to local people.

The role of SPSL is to continue to seek to maximise opportunities to benefit Suffolk’s communities, identifying and providing additional resourcing and financial contributions on top of what has already been put in place, to build upon the existing commitment and funding designated by local public services across the county.

At the start of the meeting, Cllr Suzie Morley took over responsibility as Chair of the Suffolk Public Sector Leaders Group. As part of accepting her new role, she said: “I am extremely pleased and proud to take the role of Chair from Cllr Hicks who has performed the role throughout the last two years with a great degree of focus and care, particularly as we continued to find ways to collectively adapt and face up to the challenges of Covid-19.

“Going forward, I hope we can all continue to work collaboratively with the same positive ambition and commitment to supporting Suffolk’s communities and improve access to local services for everybody across the county.”

Introducing the discussion surrounding Suffolk’s strategic approach to Covid recovery, Cllr Suzie Morley said: “Today this group is considering how best to maximise the great work that is already underway across the county. We have the opportunity here to add funding and further resources where necessary to support these projects and boost the benefits as part of Suffolk’s recovery from Covid.

“Together we are demonstrating our commitment to what Suffolk’s recovery hopefully looks like and feels like for residents and businesses. And as part of this, we remain absolutely determined to take the opportunity given to us to reduce inequalities and improve outcomes for everyone in Suffolk.

“Our approach is based on understanding the evidence, engaging with our communities and leading collaboratively to achieve positive outcomes.”

As part of the discussion surrounding Suffolk’s Strategic Recovery Plan, the group agreed to allocate the investment across the following strategic themes:

- **Climate Change** - £1.5m to implement the Suffolk’s Climate Emergency Plan agreed and launched by Leaders today
- **Inclusive Growth** - £2.05m towards supporting Suffolk’s businesses recovery and the potential Haughley Junction rail upgrade

- **Supporting Communities** - £2.6m to invest in future housing projects, improve literacy levels, identify families most in need of support and strengthen the local care offer for young people
- **Engagement** – £0.139m – to support Youth Healthwatch projects and develop a countywide approach to engaging communities

ENDS

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