

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you all for your hard work in 2021 which has been another strange year. I'd also like to thank the many organisations and volunteers within our communities for everything they do, there are too many to mention my name/s but the help and work that many of them do mostly happens unnoticed and behind the scenes.

Energy projects have been progressing and we await to hear outcomes next year.

Below you will read about the White Ribbons and the details about a webinar to help to support councillors' personal safety, I am trailing an App at the moment; lone worker, if you'd more details, please do get in touch.

The cases of the new Omicron variant of Covid are rising, we are already experiencing approx. 300,000 new cases a week so please do keep up to date and follow the advice given, also think about where and how you meet, in well ventilated areas or outside.

Congratulations to all students and staff at Alde Valley for their recent award, details below.

I wish you all a very safe and Happy Christmas and best wishes for 2022.

Best wishes,
TJ

We need to keep being sensible and safe if we want to enjoy Christmas
Matthew Hicks, Leader of Suffolk County Council

On Saturday evening, the Prime Minister, Sir Patrick Valance and Professor Chris Whitty stepped up to the Number 10 briefing podiums to announce the latest development in our battle with the COVID-19 virus.

As we have seen during the pandemic, the virus has again mutated into a new variant - known as Omicron – which has already been detected in the United Kingdom. Early analysis suggests that Omicron spreads much easier than other variants and might be more resistant to vaccines and antibodies created following previous infections. More is learnt every day.

This news made me think back to something I wrote in this column last month. It was a very simple point, but one that is brought into sharp focus by the Omicron variant being detected in our country. I was talking about how much I was looking forward to spending Christmas with my family this year. It's something that is easy to become complacent about - for most of us the festive season is an opportunity to relax, catch up and spend time with the people we love most. I have an elderly mother – so it has been very difficult seeing her during the pandemic. I'm sure that, like me, many people will be thinking ahead to December and what we can do to help make sure it is as normal as possible.

COVID clearly had a big impact on Christmas last year. Rapidly increasing rates of infection, hospitalisations and deaths created a real sense of unease and meant that we had to rethink our Christmas plans, especially when vulnerable people were

involved. It was a tough time for many, and an experience that I for one would like to avoid this year.

There will be many urgent conversations between ministers and scientists in the next few days to fully understand the impact of the variant, what measures need to be introduced and indeed, what the holiday season will look like. I have faith that it is possible to enjoy the kind of Christmas we want.

I have faith because the things we need to do are very familiar to us. We have lived with them for more than 18 months.

If we continue with those relatively small acts that we know keep us safe, we will be able to reduce the spread – and ultimately impact - of COVID. The five best actions we know keep us safe are:

- Getting fully vaccinated and having your booster when it's due
- Washing your hands regularly with soap and water
- Always wearing a face covering in crowded areas
- Ventilating indoor spaces
- Getting tested regularly and staying at home if you feel unwell

Surely, these measures are worth it in order to keep doing the things we love most – like seeing the family at Christmas, enjoying a meal at a restaurant or catching the latest blockbuster at the cinema.

We know that not everyone can follow all the guidance, such as those who can't wear face coverings, but that's ok. There is plenty you can do to stop the spread. This could include cracking open a window when a neighbour calls round or taking a lateral flow test if we're going to be in crowded public spaces. It all helps.

Suffolk is currently part of an Enhanced Response Area (ERA). We requested urgent support from Government in November as our case rates were one of the highest in the country and the number of people needing hospital treatment was increasing.

One of the priorities of being in an ERA was working to increase vaccination take-up. We have launched a push to get more people jabbed, especially in certain wards of Ipswich where up-take was low. For us, the priority was those first timers. So far, we have vaccinated more than 100 people with their first dose alone – many more had their second and booster doses. Getting your vaccination, whether that's your first, second or booster, is vital in keeping you safe from any serious harm the virus might cause.

Throughout the pandemic, Suffolk has been effective at tackling COVID. This is because we have worked hard and been proactive at every stage.

The situation facing Suffolk now calls for the same forward-thinking and preventative work to protect residents, businesses and our way of life. As we learn to live with COVID, it will be actions such as this that prevent it from having an even worse impact and, ultimately, holding back our recovery.

Let's do all we can to keep safe as we approach the festive season.

Matthew Hicks, Leader.

Annual Public Health Report focuses on Mental Health impact of Covid-19

Suffolk County Council has today endorsed far-reaching recommendations to improve Suffolk people's mental health and wellbeing.

This includes the creation of a dedicated fund of £2.5m and the development of a cross-system group to support community wellbeing in Suffolk.

Each year, the Director of Public Health in Suffolk produces an independent report, which explores a topic or area of strategic focus that is of importance to Suffolk. This year's report titled "Better, together: Public Mental Health in Suffolk", focuses on the actions that need to be taken to support and enable good mental health and wellbeing in the community, following the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The strains of the Covid-19 pandemic have meant that the issue of mental health has been in the public consciousness like never before. The unprecedented measures required to reduce the spread of the virus, have placed extraordinary pressures, and demands on the whole population, with around 1 in 5 adults in Britain experiencing some form of depression in the first three months of 2021 – more than double the figure prior to the pandemic. Almost half of adults have reported that their emotional and mental wellbeing has been affected.

The report highlights that those impacts may be as damaging and long-lasting as the physical effects of the virus. It focuses on actions which can be taken by communities, public and private sector organisations to try and mitigate these effects and protect and promote good public mental health in Suffolk now and for the future.

Stuart Keeble, Director of Public Health, said:

"Every single person in Suffolk has had their life disrupted to some degree by the Covid-19 pandemic, and while the vaccines are currently doing a good job of protecting the majority of us from serious illness, the longer-term impacts on mental health and emotional wellbeing continue to evolve.

"It is important to remember and honour what has occurred – both the terrible losses, and the extraordinary individual and collective acts of courage and kindness made by so many to protect and support others.

"Communities, workplaces, and public sector organisations must come together to create places and environments which support mental and emotional wellbeing across the whole of Suffolk."

The report makes six recommendations, which have today been endorsed by Suffolk County Council. Among the recommendations is the development of a cross system group focused on public mental health, which will report into the Health and Wellbeing Board, and a dedicated Suffolk Public Mental Health Fund to support good public mental health in Suffolk communities.

The £2.5m funding, comes from the Government's Contain Outbreak Management Fund (COMF), in recognition of the need to support Public Mental Health, which in turn both supports behaviours which continue to reduce the spread of the virus as well as supporting longer term recovery. The Health and Wellbeing Board will oversee this and will be discussing principles for how to deliver the recommendations at its next meeting in January.

Councillor Matthew Hicks, Leader of Suffolk County Council and Chair of the Health and Wellbeing Board, said:

“It is clear that the time to focus on improving public mental health is now.

“Mental wellbeing continues to be a priority for the Health and Wellbeing Board, and the County Council, as we recover from the Covid-19 pandemic.

“Keeping mentally well is not only vital for individuals and families, but also for communities and the economy. The people of Suffolk stand the strongest chance of getting Better, Together.”

To view the report: The 2021 Annual Public Health Report for Suffolk, ‘Better, Together: Public Mental Health in Suffolk’ <https://www.healthysuffolk.org.uk/jsna/annual-public-health-report>

Suffolk lends its support to White Ribbon Campaign

Organisations across Suffolk are wearing their white ribbon with pride, as the county began 16 days of action to help end domestic abuse.



The international White Ribbon Campaign, (November 25) and runs until December 10, asks its supporters to wear a white ribbon, sending a clear message that domestic abuse should never be condoned.

It also encourages men to promise to never commit, excuse, or remain silent about male violence against women, with this year's theme centring on #AllMenCan following the tragic murder of Sarah Everard in March and conversations this prompted.

Councillors and staff from Suffolk County Council made the promise and pledged their support, along with the Police and Crime Commissioner, domestic abuse charities, and representatives from Suffolk Constabulary and the county's Community Safety Partnerships.

This marked the start of 16 days of action by the council – including community outreach projects with local schools and foodbanks – as it seeks to raise awareness of the help available for victim-survivors of domestic abuse.

Data published recently by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) has highlighted the importance of this, following a 6% increase in domestic abuse during the year ending March 2021, with 845,734 domestic abuse-related crimes being recorded nationally in this timeframe.

There was also a 22% increase in calls to the National Domestic Abuse Helpline in England during this period.

Councillor Andrew Reid, cabinet member for Public Health, Public Protection and Communities commented:

“Our council is proud to lend its support not just to this worthy campaign, but to tackling domestic abuse all year-round, as we continue to work with partners to ensure that everyone can feel safe in our communities.

“We know that this devastating crime is, sadly, on the increase nationally, making it even more timely to send a clear message that violence of this kind will not be tolerated or condoned in our county.

“I would urge all men in Suffolk to make the white ribbon promise and take a stand against domestic abuse – showing victim-survivors that they are not alone and do not need to suffer in silence anymore.”

Those wishing to pledge their support for the campaign should visit [the white ribbon website](#), or follow Suffolk County Council’s social media channels for further information on how to get involved in the county’s 16 days of action.

Anyone who is worried that they, or someone they know, may be a victim of domestic abuse can call the Suffolk Domestic Abuse Helpline free of charge 24 hours a day on 0800 977 5690.

Perpetrators can contact the Respect Phoneline on 0808 802 4040 for confidential advice on how to stop hurting the one they love.

Which leads to:

The LGA has launched a series of webinars to help to support councillors’ personal safety. These events are UK Government funded and are therefore open to councillors from all councils, including community, town and parish councils. The aim of the session will be to equip councillors with the best tools to help them be and feel safe while carrying out their duties as a councillor. The sessions will cover principles of personal safety, risk assessment, use of technology, safe approaches to canvassing, visits, surgeries and travelling, alongside how to manage harassment and stalking incidents. Attendees will have the opportunity to ask questions about their specific circumstances.

The next event is scheduled for Wednesday, 8th December 2021 10.30am to 12.00pm, and the programme is below for information. This will be a virtual Zoom webinar and places can be booked via the LGA site: [Local Government Association](#)

Programme

10.30	Welcome and introduction Cllr Marianne Overton MBE , Lincolnshire County Council and North Kesteven District Council
10.35	Personal safety for councillors - presentation and questions Miranda Smythe , The Baikie-Wood Consultancy Ltd
11.55	Chair's closing remarks
12.00	Close

Share your thoughts on prioritising future County Council Services as part of planning the 2022/23 budget

Public consultation launched to find out where people place their priorities and thoughts on how council funds its services.

Following the Chancellor's recent Spending Review and Autumn Budget, Suffolk County Council will have the option to raise Council Tax by 2% and the Adult Social Care Precept by 2%. With local authorities continuing to respond to the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, global supply chain issues and climate change, Suffolk County Council is asking residents for their thoughts on helping the council prioritise its funding towards services in the coming financial year alongside meeting the continuing costs of statutory care services.

Although the last two years have proved to be an extraordinary time, the county council continues to aim to provide the best possible outcomes for local people through a multitude of frontline services that support residents, businesses, and the county at large.

With rising costs and increasing service demand year on year, the finances at our disposal have to be carefully planned and considered for us to continue to achieve a balanced budget each year in extremely challenging circumstances.

Suffolk County Council's priorities this year are to:

- promote and support the health and wellbeing of all people in Suffolk
- strengthen our local economy
- protect and enhance our environment
- provide value for money for the Suffolk taxpayer

With careful financial management and planning, the county council has already saved hundreds of millions of pounds during the last decade, whilst being innovative in the delivery of many of its services. Many challenges remain in the light of the recent pandemic, and the continuing difficult financial position that many local authorities have faced for a number of years.

Councillor Richard Rout, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Environment at Suffolk County Council, says:

"Local public services continue to face many financial challenges as we look to recover from COVID, address rising energy costs and invest our limited resources and money in the priority areas of service to protect our most vulnerable residents.

"As part of the annual budgeting process, it is important to hear your thoughts on the services we deliver, to understand which ones you believe should be prioritised, and how we may look to fund future spending in these areas.

"Did you know that around 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 the many other vital services we provide, including Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service, road maintenance, footpaths, waste services, libraries and addressing the challenges surrounding climate change, to name just a handful. Year on year we are seeing particular

challenges in continuing to provide adult care and children's services within budget. Adult care alone costs around £271m each year.

"We are absolutely committed to providing the best services for all residents, but like all councils we do not have unlimited funds. This means that if residents want us to spend more money on certain services, we have to spend less in other areas in order to continue to balance our budget now and in the future.

"I want to understand more about the areas you want us to focus on with the budget that we have left over after covering our statutory care duties. Whilst this may be limited, we continue to use every penny wisely to bring many benefits to Suffolk. As part of this engagement, we want to find out where people place their priorities and how they feel about the way in which we fund these services.

"Thank you for your participation in this important aspect of planning our annual budget."

Councillor Rout continues:

"I'm encouraged by the fact that the Chancellor has recognised the excellent work carried out by local authorities in the last year announcing new grant funding of £4.8billion for local authorities over the next three years. We wait to see in the coming months, how much comes to Suffolk."

A proposed budget will be presented at the Cabinet meeting on 1 February 2022 and the final budget will be discussed at Full Council on 17 February 2022.

More information about the council's finances and the consultation can be found at [suffolk.gov.uk/budget2022](https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/budget2022)

<https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/consultations-petitions-and-elections/consultations/your-thoughts-on-council-tax-and-our-services-for-2022-23/>

The consultation closes on Monday 20 December 2021.

Alde Valley Academy - Suffolk's Greenest County Awards Winners Announced

Suffolk celebrates the people and organisations making the biggest environmental difference in the county.



As COP26 closed, Suffolk celebrates the people and organisations making the biggest environmental difference in the county. An innovative food recycling company, a nature reserve and the county's Tree Warden Network are among those collecting awards at The Hold in Ipswich today (Friday 12 November 2021).

Councillor Richard Rout, Suffolk County Council's Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Environment, said:

“Once again, our Greenest County Award winners demonstrate that Suffolk has some of the most innovative, passionate and forward thinking people and organisations in the UK. We hope these stories inspire everyone to think hard about how they can help, as they not only address the climate emergency here in Suffolk, but set a standard for all organisations and industry, leading the way to a greener country and more sustainable world.”

Greenest School Award sponsored by Suffolk Group Holdings Ltd.

Winner: Alde Valley Academy

Alde Valley Academy is one of the top ten high achieving secondary schools in Suffolk. The mixed academy in Leiston has around 550 students and was rated Good by Ofsted at the last inspection. It’s vision is to become an Outstanding school and enable students to realise their full potential and prepare them to become responsible, successful citizens. By ramping up their student and staff awareness and engagement with environmental issues, they are reducing their environmental impact across the school and in their community.

What the judges said: “Great involvement from everyone with ambition for the future to drive to net zero carbon. They’ve used a clear goal to focus efforts and engage the whole school.”