

As some of you know Fostering is a subject close to my heart, I have the privilege of assessing, meeting, approving and reviewing foster and kinship carers etc through my role at Suffolk County Council, there is an event coming soon about becoming a carer where you can find out more, details below.

Cllr Burroughes, Deputy Cabinet Member for Children and Young Peoples Services with responsibility for Fostering and Adoption.

Few people realise just how vital foster carers are in Suffolk, there are 900 children currently living in loving foster homes across the county and this number continues to increase each year.

Against this backdrop there is an urgent need to recruit more foster carers for Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) who make the brave and harrowing journey to flee war and destruction in their home countries and find refuge and safety here in the UK.

Tracey is a foster carer with Suffolk County Council and regularly shares her home with unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. I have invited her to talk about her experiences, in the hope it may inspire others to consider becoming a foster carer for UASC children;



Tracey, a foster carer with Suffolk County Council

Why did you decide to become a foster carer?

I started fostering seven years ago when I was working in the local upper school's exclusion department. I realised an awful lot of children were children in care. I started at an agency and was an approved foster carer with them for a couple of years, and then transferred to Suffolk County Council. It was a very smooth transition – I haven't looked back.

What led to you fostering Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children?

I didn't go into fostering thinking that I would like to foster UASC but I was keen to as I had lived in Sudan for six months. Then it was literally a phone call at 11pm saying they had found a lovely young boy in the back of a lorry at Mildenhall Air Force Base and would I foster him. By the time he arrived it was 3am and he walked in looking like a rabbit caught in the headlights – he was the sweetest 13-year-old boy from Eritrea and that was our first experience. There weren't the usual foster care nerves - you just want to nurture them.

How did he settle in to foster care?

All he wanted to do for a while was sleep. It was the first time he slept in a bed and the first night he fell out of his bed. The second night he had made a pallet on the floor with his duvet, but he slowly got into bed. It was a very slow natural organic process, letting him settle in and slowly introducing him to the house, the family, the village and school. In the obligatory first day at school photo, he was beaming, and he never missed a day of school in two years -

he would even go if he was feeling poorly because education to him was so important. He was soon signed up to a football team and became their star player.

Was there a language barrier?

He didn't speak a word of English, so it was lots of gesticulation and lots of stickers over the furniture. I would say he was fluent within six months, and he wasn't in school for a while. The first two or three months we used to sit at the table and practise handwriting with primary school books. I just thought let's pretend he's five and it was lovely.

What support do the children receive from the fostering team?

Foster children are immediately assigned a social worker, who are fantastic. The social worker provided a translator and explained what was going to happen to him regarding Home Office interviews, solicitors' interviews, biometrics and asking him a little bit about his journey. My involvement was getting him registered with schools, doctors and dentists.

Do you have a network of support?

Through social media I connected with fostering support groups, so my network expanded, and it is invaluable. Sometimes you don't want to ring your supervising social worker because it sounds so trivial so I have called other foster carers late in the evening and said, '*what would you do in this situation*'.

Where is your foster son now?

He's at college learning motor mechanics, he also is a driver on his bike for Deliveroo. He rings me once a month and you can tell he is just so happy in his voice. He is just the perfect example of someone that came here and was grateful for everything.

What would you say to someone considering becoming a foster carer for UASC children?

I would say give it a go, because you have nothing to lose and so much to gain. It has been a lovely journey and one I don't want to get off.

To find out more about Fostering with Suffolk:

visit www.suffolk.gov.uk/fostering

call us on: 01473 264800

Attend our virtual UASC information event on Wednesday 22 February, 7pm.

Email fosterandadopt@suffolk.gov.uk to register your interest

More funds confirmed for children’s services, adult care and the environment

The £687.6m package was approved at a Full Council meeting on Thursday 9 February 2023, with a focus on children’s services, adult care and the environment.

In an online survey, Suffolk residents said that they would like to see more spent on adult services and children’s services, and these areas will receive an additional £35.7m and £13.5m, respectively.”

“We are protecting the services that people rely on the most and we will be able to continue caring for the most vulnerable in Suffolk.

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



In addition, the council’s net zero carbon budget, which had previously been approved by Cabinet, sits alongside the financial budget. It is a report on how the organisation is progressing to its ambitious target of being net zero by 2030, enabling the council to measure its carbon emissions, monitor its environmental impact, and identify actions and costs needed to reduce those emissions.

Councillor Richard Rout, went onto say:

“Despite the challenges in the national and international economy, and the significant increase in demand for our services, we have successfully delivered a balanced budget. We are protecting the services that people rely on the most and we will be able to continue caring for the most vulnerable in Suffolk.

“We have identified over £15m of savings across the organisation, but this will not see any reductions in services, and some areas will see investment. We are committed to always providing the best value for everyone in Suffolk.”

The council’s budget will increase by nearly 10% (from £625.3m to £687.6m), the additional money largely generated by a 3.99% increase in the council’s share of Council Tax, and more funds from the Government for adult and children’s social care.

The increase of 3.99% to Council Tax is made up of a 1.99% increase in general Council Tax and a 2.00% increase dedicated to funding adult care. This will see the council’s share of a Band B property’s bill rise by 86 pence per week, compared to last year.

Councillor Rout adds:

“There is a direct link between our carbon budget and our finance budget. Much like in our homes, if we can reduce the amount of energy we use and be more efficient, we can save money.

“We are making investments now so that we can save money in the future and reduce carbon emissions, from installing more solar panels and better insulation, to more technical improvements which help manage our buildings.”

Hundreds of illegal vapes seized in Suffolk

Suffolk Trading Standards has stopped the sale of dangerous vapes at premises in Ipswich, Felixstowe, and Lowestoft in their bid to tackle one of the top threats on the high street.



Some of the vapes seized by Suffolk Trading Standards
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Officers recently discovered over 370 vapes which did not meet the legal requirements, including some which offered as many as 10,000 puffs when a legal vape would offer around 600.

Thanks to the tireless work of Suffolk Trading Standards, hundreds of potentially deadly vapes have been withdrawn from sale in our county.



Councillor Andrew Reid, Cabinet Member for Public Health and Public Protection, When used properly, vapes and e-cigarettes can be a successful way of helping people to stop smoking. But criminals are capitalising on this, leading to a rise in illegal vapes, which can contain high levels of nicotine, contaminants, or banned ingredients such as taurine or caffeine.

In addition, some retailers are increasingly selling vapes to underage children, who are often enticed by the colourful packaging and sweet flavours used by some vaping manufacturers.

Graham Crisp, Head of Suffolk Trading Standards, said:

“The sale of illegal vapes, coupled with sales made to those who are under 18, poses one of the biggest threats on high streets across the country at present.

“Suffolk Trading Standards has seen a considerable increase in vapes which do not meet health guidelines and could cause respiratory problems, heart and lung damage or even death for the user.

“We will continue to carry out spot checks on retailers across Suffolk, taking legal action where necessary, with tough penalties for businesses who flout the laws put in place to help protect the public.”

Cllr Andrew Reid, Cabinet Member for Public Health and Public Protection, added:

"Thanks to the tireless work of Suffolk Trading Standards, hundreds of potentially deadly vapes have been withdrawn from sale in our county.

“Whilst people shouldn’t be put off using vapes, which the Government recognises is the number one tool in helping smokers quit effectively, they should only purchase products from a reputable retailer and question any strange looking packaging.

“It is also important to remember that vapes should never be used by children, who are more susceptible to becoming addicted to nicotine and the damage this can cause to brains and lungs.”

Consumers can protect themselves by looking out for the following to ensure the vape that they are purchasing is legal:

- The tank of a vape is a maximum size of 2ml, and the largest refill bottle is 10ml in size or less
- All liquids should come in childproof bottles displaying nicotine warnings and have an accompanying safety leaflet
- Vapes should have a nicotine strength of no more than 20mg/ml or 2%
- A maximum number of around 600 puffs is offered

Anyone who suspects that a shop is selling unsafe e-cigarettes and vaping liquids or making sales of age-restricted products to children can report this in confidence to Suffolk Trading Standards via the Citizens Advice Consumer helpline on **0808 223 1133**.

Suffolk in partnership

Last week we announced that more than 100 organisations have now signed up to the Suffolk Information Partnership, a network of organisations offering information and advice and delivering services to support people’s health and wellbeing in Suffolk.

The Partnership helps thousands of Suffolk Residents access the services they need every year and we are so proud of how the partnership has grown.

Formed in 2010 with just five key voluntary sector organisations in Suffolk - Age UK Suffolk, Optua (now Avenues East), Suffolk Family Carers, Suffolk Libraries and Suffolk Mind - alongside Suffolk County Council's Adult Social Care services, it has now expanded to more than 100 statutory, voluntary and independent sector organisations delivering services to support younger and older people, adults and families across Suffolk.

The 100th partner to join the network was *Our Special Friends*, a Suffolk based charity that works to help people to benefit from animal companionship by providing physical and emotional support during illness, bereavement or other crises.

The aim of the Partnership is to work together to provide clear, consistent, quality information to customers and a seamless journey for those needing to access services.

Partners provide a wide range of services covering the whole county, some supporting emotional wellbeing, such as Suffolk Mind and Suffolk Libraries who have a Mental Health and Wellbeing service, provide advice and guidance on a variety of topics, including books, and provide community activities.

Other organisations provide information and guidance for families, such as Suffolk Family Carers and Home Start; support with loneliness and isolation, like the Rural Coffee Caravan; support with physical activity through Active Suffolk's exercise referral and Active communities schemes, and much, much more.

Alongside care, health and wellbeing, a number of partners also offer Suffolk residents support with the Cost of Living.

Citizens Advice in Suffolk offer free, confidential and impartial advice and support to all who need it. They can help people find a way forward with their problems and campaign on big issues when their voices need to be heard.

Citizens Advice can support people to maximise their income, through reviewing benefit entitlements, saving money on energy costs and accessing grants when needed, and the Citizens Advice Money team can negotiate with debtors, enabling clients to manage their daily lives more effectively.

They are also a gateway partner for welfare assistance, providing guidance and advice. Anyone experiencing financial hardship can apply for help through Suffolk's Local Welfare Assistance Scheme. Successful applications will receive a BACS payment directly into a bank account or a Post Office cash out voucher. Visit www.suffolk.gov.uk/lwas to find out if you are eligible for support.

Warm Homes, Healthy People is a project which helps vulnerable people and families make their homes cheaper to heat. There is a range of different measures that eligible residents in Suffolk can benefit from, including emergency fuel payments and help with boiler issues. Find out more at <https://www.warmhomessuffolk.org/about>

You can find out more about Cost of Living support in Suffolk by visiting www.suffolk.gov.uk/costofliving

The Suffolk Information Partnership meets regularly to share updates on its services and discuss topics of interest as well as providing peer support and informal mentoring. Being in the partnership also gives organisations access to a toolkit of resources and the Warm Handover referral scheme, which allows organisations to refer clients directly to another organisation, where they identify that the client would benefit from other support that their organisation cannot provide.

The Suffolk Information Partnership and Warm Handover Referral Scheme are free to join.

With 45 new organisations joining the last year and more than 3,000 referrals made through the partnership I want to say a huge thank you to all the partners that have joined the Suffolk

Information Partnership over the years, for your invaluable support in making it the success that it is today. We couldn't have done it without you!

For more information about the Suffolk Information Partnership and Warm Handover, visit: <http://suffolkinformationpartnership.onesuffolk.net/>

The Suffolk Information Partnership is open to statutory, voluntary and independent sector organisations operating across or within local communities in Suffolk. If your organisation would like to join, please send a short paragraph about what your organisation does, your logo and contact details to suffolkinformationpartnership@suffolk.gov.uk

Suffolk Information Partnership Celebrates 100 Partners

More than 100 organisations have now signed up to the Suffolk Information Partnership (SIP).

The Suffolk Information Partnership is a network of organisations offering information and advice and delivering services to support people's health and wellbeing in Suffolk.

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Cabinet backs consultation on devolution deal worth over half a billion pounds for Suffolk

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Councillors have agreed to progress to consultation on Suffolk's proposed devolution deal which would hand the county more powers and control of over half a billion pounds in investment.

The decision was made at a meeting of Suffolk County Council's Cabinet this afternoon.

Councillor Matthew Hicks, Leader of Suffolk County Council, said:

“This proposed deal represents a big opportunity for Suffolk. By improving local transport infrastructure, building more affordable homes, and developing skills and training provision in a way that meets the needs of the local economy and local people, we could create new opportunities and raise living standards for our communities.

“This is the start of a journey for Suffolk, and if agreed, this deal would mark a step change in our relationship with Government, placing us front and centre as a key partner and allowing us to ensure that Suffolk's voice is heard in the national conversation. In time, it would open the door to further negotiations and even greater self-determination.

“I look forward to hearing residents' and businesses' views on this proposed landmark deal.”

A public consultation will be undertaken in early summer 2023 which will give residents and businesses the opportunity to have their say on Suffolk's proposed devolution deal. To enact the deal, a resolution to change the County Council's governance to a Directly Elected Leader and Cabinet model will need to be taken to Council for consideration. If approved, the Directly Elected Leader's election will be held within six months of that decision.

Best wishes

TJ