

I would like to take this opportunity to wish you all a very Happy New Year. I hope you all had an enjoyable and peaceful Christmas. My thanks to everyone that contributed towards the festive activities for their hard work and continued support.

My thanks also to all those that responded to the non-statutory consultations. As we all know, it will be yet another year of consultations for this area, so it is vital that we work together and communicate fully.

You will note below that SCC has a new look website, please do have a look if you have time. On the home page there are quick links to useful and traffic pages, school terms, applying for school places, reporting highway issues and so on. Please do let me have any feedback.

Remembering Councillor Graham Newman: Our Tribute

Suffolk County Council today pays tribute to Councillor Graham Newman, who died on Wednesday 28th December following a short illness.

It is with great sadness that this council remembers Cllr Graham Newman who sadly passed away on Wednesday 28 December 2022 following a short illness.

Graham had been a Suffolk County Councillor for Felixstowe Coastal since 2005 and was a full and active member of the county council from the moment he was elected. An enthusiastic public servant, Graham rose to the challenge of joining the administration's Cabinet several times, first by being appointed as Cabinet Member for Adult Services in May 2006, before moving to lead on Children, Schools, and Young People's Services in 2009 and then holding the Cabinet post for Roads and Transport from 2013 until 2015.

Graham was elected Vice Chairman in 2019 and went on to become Chairman of Suffolk County Council in October 2020. His time as Chairman, which lasted 18 months until May 2022 and spanned most of the COVID pandemic, will be long remembered. Not only for his steadfast stewardship at a time of great change, especially the use of new technology to help council meetings continue virtually, but also for his relaxed and reassuring presence in the chair - much needed in those stressful pandemic days.

Graham was also active in the various committees of the council, having chaired several of them over the years, notably as Chairman of the Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Committee, and most recently as Chairman of the Education Transport Appeals Committee.

In Graham, Suffolk had an exemplar model of what a county councillor should be. A defender of local decision making, a committed public servant, an honest representative of his division and a champion for the people he represented. His loss will be felt by all his colleagues, regardless of politics. All our thoughts and sympathies are with his family and friends at this sad time.

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

Graham was a hugely dedicated Councillor, a gentleman and a friend to us all.

He was so passionate and dedicated about Felixstowe, which he loved and he never let us forget. Over the years Graham held so many senior roles and he was a great mentor to those of us that joined the council after him.

He also had a great interest and knowledge in trains, buses and cycle routes across our county which he always put to great use. He was well respected by everyone and will be sorely missed.

Our thoughts and prayers are with his family at this very difficult time.

Council to protect frontline services and increase funding in budget proposal

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Despite an incredibly challenging economic climate, the council has been able to produce a balanced budget. This will protect the services that people rely on the most and continue to care for the most vulnerable, which accounts for 75% of the whole budget.

Adult care services will have £34m more in their budget, and children's services will have a further £13m. This will help with the extra expense needed to meet the huge increase in demands for services, as well as higher costs due to inflation.

The budget-setting has been achieved with input from the council's partners, officers, departments and notably, Suffolk residents. Over 2,600 local people contributed to an online survey and focus groups, asking where they would spend more money, spend less money, and their views on Council Tax.

The top service areas where people wanted to spend more, were social care services for adults and children.

Adult and children's care were at the heart of our budget setting last year, and are again this year. This is exactly what people told us in our public survey too, so we are all in agreement about investing more in these areas, and it meets one of our four ambitions for Suffolk - to look after people's health and wellbeing.

This year, it's a case of being prudent across all areas of the organisation. Even though we have created £15.5m of savings, our frontline services are protected and receiving more funding.

Alongside an increase in our funding from Government, and a history of excellent financial management at the council, I'm proud that we've been able to navigate our way through the extremely turbulent, economic waters caused by the Covid-19 pandemic and Vladimir

Putin's illegal war in Ukraine. We will be able to ensure that the services which mean the most to people, are still provided.

Councillor Richard Rout:

Some of the service areas where people also said they wanted to see more money spent, will receive additional funding:

- £700,000 for SEND services to support new recruitment, which is on top of the £1.1m invested this year
- £500,000 for Highways: to use environmentally friendly weed treatments, and stop using glyphosate which can damage wildlife
- £110,000 for tree management: to support the 'right tree right place' policy, having an appropriate inspection regime and supporting the resulting tree management requirements.
- £45,000 for Citizens Advice: to support work during cost of living challenges

A budget gap for next year - the difference between what money is available and what needs to be spent - had already been identified, resulting in savings of £15.5m for next year.

Under the proposals, the council's budget would increase by 9.6% (from £625.3m to £685.3). Additional funds would come from a total 3.99% increase in Council Tax, and an increase in funds from the Government for adult and children's social care.

Regarding Council Tax, the proposed 3.99% increase would be made up of a 1.99% increase in general Council Tax and a 2.00% increase dedicated to funding adult care.

This means costs for a household would look like:

- Band B property: £22.32 per week (85 pence per week increase from 2022-23)
(Band B properties are the most common in Suffolk)
- Band D property: £28.70 per week (£1.10 pence per week increase from 2022-23)

I'm grateful to all those who completed our survey and could understand the difficult position that the council is in, with more demands on our services than ever before, and increasing costs due to inflation.

Our survey results tell me that people appreciate the need to increase Council Tax – 49% of people supported an increase, compared with 32% who didn't.

We want to strike the fairest balance possible. We have produced a budget proposal which means we don't have to take as much Council Tax from people, as Government allows us to. This means a Band B property, the most common in Suffolk, will see an increase of 85p per week.

Just like at the council, I understand that every penny counts in homes around the county.

The proposed budget will be discussed at the council's Scrutiny meeting on 10 January 2023, then presented at the Cabinet meeting on 24 January, with the final budget debated and voted on at Full Council on 9 February.

The Scrutiny meeting will be available to stream on [Suffolk County Council's YouTube channel](#), and public questions can be submitted in advance, details available at www.suffolk.gov.uk

Suffolk County Council becomes a Disability Confident Leader

Suffolk County Council has achieved Disability Confident Leader status, the highest level in the national Disability Confident scheme.

This achievement recognises the progress the council has made to make both its recruitment processes and working environment more inclusive for disabled people and follows the council attaining Disability Confident Employer status in 2017.

Being a Disability Confident organisation means the council plays a leading role in changing attitudes, behaviour and cultures, both within the organisation, and wider, through its networks and communities. Becoming a Disability Confident Leader means that the County Council will also act as a champion in supporting other businesses in the area to become Disability Confident.

According to data from the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP), more than 4.7 million disabled people are in work, and yet disabled people are almost twice as likely to be unemployed as non-disabled people, and three times as likely to be economically inactive. The employment rate of disabled people is estimated to be 53%, compared to 82% of non-disabled people.

There are also many people in employment who don't share their disability with their employer or who aren't yet aware of it themselves. Over 80% of disabilities are invisible, In Suffolk County Council, 61% of staff have declared their status, the council aims to increase this number with the measures it has put in place in becoming a Disability Confident Leader.

Nicola Beach, Chief Executive of Suffolk County Council, said:

“As an employer, we recognise the benefits for both our employees and for the organisation, of creating a supportive culture in which people feel comfortable to disclose their disability, and we try to build accessibility into everything we do. At Suffolk County Council we value diversity, and it is so important that our workforce reflects the communities we serve. “The Disability Confident scheme provides a best practice framework for employers to move towards improved disability inclusion.”

Some of the council's actions to achieve Disability Confident Leader status have included:

- Offering disabled candidates the chance to take part in the Disability Confident Interview Scheme, where they are guaranteed an interview for a job they have applied for, if they meet the minimum criteria.
- Engaging with our local Job Centre, supporting jobs fairs for disabled job seekers.
- Having active staff networks focussed on disabilities, such as The disABILITY Network, The Mental Health Network, The D(d)eaf Network and The Neurodiversity Network.
- Offering reasonable adjustments during both the recruitment process and employment to support disabled people.
- Making disability inclusion training part of our mandatory training for all staff.
- Considering Disability Confident status when reviewing the social value of contracts we commission.
- Offering priority consideration for vacancies to internal disabled staff.
- Making adjustments to our buildings to ensure they are accessible to disabled people.
- Having guidance about accessible communications, which is the expected default for all of our communications

Nicola Beach added:

“Looking forward, our Disability Strategy, alongside feedback from our Disability Confident Leader validators, the Business Disability Forum, will help us to continue to improve the experiences for disabled people within our organisation and in our community.”

Councillor Bobby Bennett, Cabinet Member for Equality and Communities, said:

We are proud to act as a role model for disability inclusion. We welcome and support disabled people at Suffolk County Council, and we encourage other organisations to join the Disability Confident Scheme by visiting disabilityconfident.campaign.gov.uk

Warning after children seen playing on frozen pond

Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service is reminding the public of the dangers of icy water following children recently seen playing on a frozen pond in the county.

The advice comes after a tragic incident on Sunday, 11 December, in which four young boys died after falling into an icy lake at Babbs Mill Park near Solihull.

Since then, Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service has increased patrols at ponds, lakes, and reservoirs across the county to help highlight how dangerous icy water can be.

Despite recent safety messages from the service, firefighters have still seen children playing on a frozen pond at a park in Lowestoft, with members of the public reporting that they had also witnessed children testing the ice near the water's edge.

An inspection of the pond revealed that the ice is only a few centimetres thick and liable to break at any moment.

Toby Gray, Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service Area Manager for Prevention and Protection said:

“Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service was deeply saddened to hear of the incident in Solihull, and our thoughts remain with all those affected.

“We want to ensure that a similar tragedy doesn’t happen in Suffolk, so our crews have been visiting parks and other public open spaces to help educate people on the lethal consequences of icy water and put posters up detailing safety advice.

“It is shocking that anyone is still playing on frozen water despite the dangers of doing so being well publicised recently. I would ask that parents speak to their children about staying away from iced-over water. You may think that your child has more sense, but it is easy to give into peer pressure without thinking about how deadly ice can be.”

Further advice on winter water safety, including what to do if you fall through the ice, is available at www.rlss.org.uk/winter-water-safety.

Who is your Green Hero in Suffolk?

The Creating the Greenest County Awards have recognised hundreds of Suffolk people down the years, and now is the time for you to nominate your green hero!

The Awards celebrate the achievements of Suffolk’s residents, businesses, schools, communities and organisations who are protecting our environment and reducing their carbon emissions.

Nominations are now open online and close on 1 February 2023, with an environmentally-friendly ceremony to be held in March.

The Green Hero Award is one of the most popular categories, shining the spotlight on someone who has taken it upon themselves to lead the way in working for the environment. It’s the only award for which both the nominees and the winners are chosen by the public.

The most recent winner is Debbie Bartlett, who set up Litter-Free Felixstowe, a community interest group with over 1,200 members and continues to make an impact across the town and surrounding area. The group works with local schools and businesses and their number of active volunteers continues to grow.

Debbie received over 1,000 votes to become Suffolk’s Green Hero

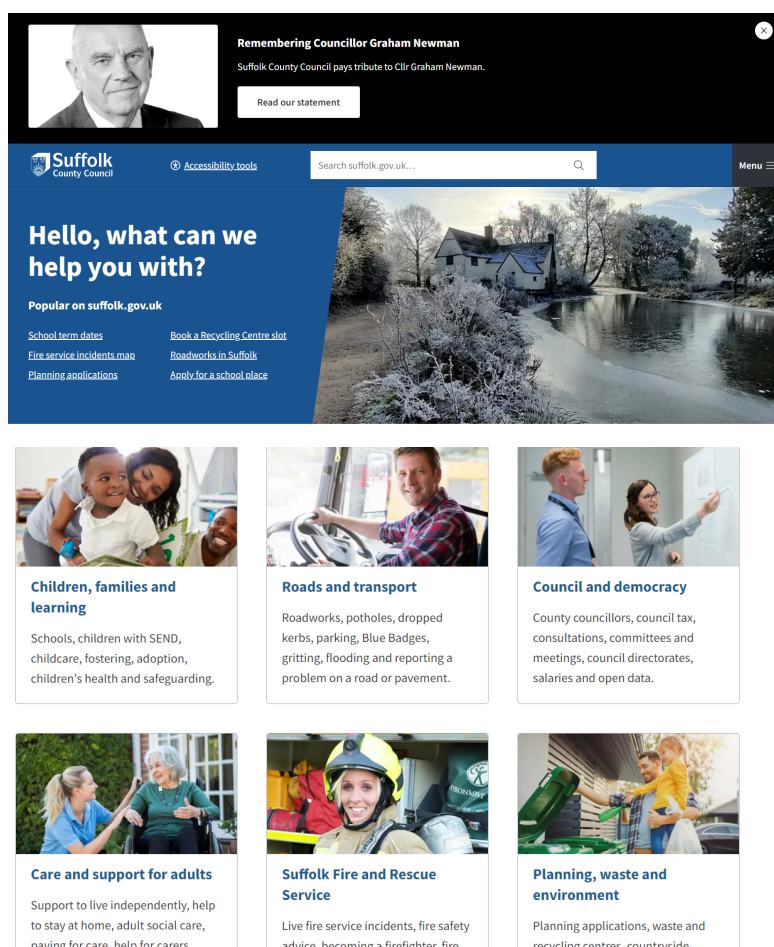
“At our last litter-pick we attracted nearly 120 people and with large numbers attending, we can really make a difference. We are determined to get our major roads cleared of rubbish and last year launched ‘Litter-Free Roads & Lay-bys’ with the national hauliers. It is vital that everyone works together to prevent littering by all road users - the message must be embedded in corporate and public culture, and we are working to roll out the Litter-

Free pledge and include it in environment policies, corporate social responsibility statements and employee induction programmes”.

Closing date for entries is the 1st February, more details on:

<https://www.greensuffolk.org/creating-the-greenest-county-awards/>

Introducing the new look SCC website



As always, I will send any other updates through as and when.

Best regards

TJ