

March 2019 report for the Thredling Division from Cllr Matthew Hicks

Suffolk County Council 2019/20 budget approved

On 14 February, Suffolk County Council concluded its budget setting process for this coming financial year (2019/2020). From 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020, Suffolk County Council will spend almost £10 million a week across all its services following approval of this budget of £519.3 million. Over the period 2011-12 to 2018-19 the Council has made over £260 million of savings in response to reductions in funding from Central Government and increasing demand for services. For 2019/20 the Council has proposed a range of savings totalling around £13 million. These savings are required to help balance the budget - something that the Council must do by law.

Recognising the unrelenting rise in demand and the complexity of support required by vulnerable children and adults in Suffolk, the Council are significantly increasing spending in these two top priority areas. The net budget for Adult and Community Services (ACS) will rise to £243m and the net budget for Health, Wellbeing and Children's Services (HWCS) will rise to £147m. This is an increase of just over £14 million for ACS and HWCS. ACS and HWCS will account for 75% of the total spend in 2019/2020 - three in every four pounds the Council spends. General council tax will rise by 2.99% this year. The Council are also applying the final 1% of the six per cent Social Care precept allowed over the years 2017/18 to 2019/20. The overall increase in council tax is one per cent less than for 2018/19. The four-year investment in surface-dressing our roads continues into its third year and the Council will treat 1,000 miles of Suffolk's roads by the end of 2020 as promised. The Council has also maintained Suffolk Fire and Rescue's budget and protected Suffolk's Library services. The Council is looking to maximise the financial contribution from its medium-term programmes, which focus on transforming how the Council delivers its services and works with other authorities and public sector partners. The Council's transformation programmes have saved over £12 million in 2018/19 and £12-£13 million of savings are planned for 2019/20. There are no easy choices at this point. Every call we have to make on where to find savings is tough, but we must balance the budget by law and it is right to focus our efforts on our highest priority areas to protect and support our most vulnerable residents.

Funding agreed for Citizens Advice in Suffolk

On 11 February, it was reported that Citizens Advice in Suffolk will no longer see any difference in their funding for 2019/20. This is due to a collaboration between Suffolk County Council, NHS Ipswich and East Suffolk Clinical Commissioning Group and NHS West Suffolk Clinical Commissioning Group, Suffolk County Council proposes to reduce the funding given to Citizens Advice by 50% (£187k), in 2019/20. Under the joint agreement now in place with the CCGs, a total of £187k will be provided by NHS Ipswich and East Suffolk and NHS West Suffolk CCGs. So, funding for Citizens Advice in 2019/20 will remain the same as the previous year (£374k). Doctor Ed Garratt, Chief Officer for Ipswich and East Suffolk CCG and West Suffolk CCG, said:

"By working together with our colleagues at the Council, we have been able to identify future funding for Citizens Advice. This is a great example of Suffolk's authorities supporting each other to find solutions."

County Council announces timescale to progress the Ipswich Northern Route project

On 27 February, SCC announced the timescale to progress the Ipswich Northern Route project. SCC has outlined the next steps in producing the Strategic Outline Business Case, which will examine and ultimately clarify the feasibility of an Ipswich northern route. Discussions about an Ipswich northern route have been well documented over the years. This announcement confirms the County Council's commitment to explore these formally with a public consultation which will inform the Strategic Outline Business Case to be put to government and published later in the year. The timescale for moving the project forward is: The stage one study and report into possible highways options was completed in 2017; The options assessment and development commissioned in May 2018 is currently being evaluated and prepared for shortlisting, prior to consultation; Public consultation on the route details, alignment options and junction options with the A14 and A12 - to begin in the Summer 2019; Completion of the Strategic Outline Business Case to be shared with government, local MPs and the public - Autumn 2019. The options assessment, that forms a key part of the Strategic Outline Business Case, is required to look at all other viable transport and traffic mitigation options. This will confirm whether the road alignments published in 2017 are indeed the best solution for the county. After carefully considering the assessment and developing these options further, the next stage is public consultation to begin in summer 2019. The initial study, options assessment and the results of the public consultation inform the Strategic Outline Business Case, which will provide clarity on the feasibility of the project and will determine whether the project can proceed to the next stage. That will be shared publicly for consideration in the Autumn of 2019.

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