

December 2021 report for the Thredling Division from Cllr Matthew Hicks

Government funding boost for Suffolk community schemes

On November 5th, two Suffolk schemes received Government funding totalling more than £940,000. Enabling Self-Employment in Suffolk and the Suffolk Road to Net Zero business support programme are among 477 schemes across the country to receive backing from the Community Renewal Fund. This is a £200 million pot set up by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities aimed at boosting skills training for the unemployed and investing in businesses developing low-carbon technology. The two Suffolk schemes, which are both being led by New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership (NALEP) and which were put forward by SCC, receive a total of £945,974. Enabling Self-Employment, which receives £412,208, delivers self-employment support across Suffolk, particularly amongst disadvantaged communities in East Suffolk. Building on the established programme of Business Start-Up support in Norfolk and Suffolk, it works with employed and unemployed people – including those who were on furlough or who are under-employed and economically vulnerable – from deprived groups and communities. Suffolk Road to Net Zero receives £533,766. This is a scheme offering grants to support businesses in developing low-carbon projects and which contribute to the Suffolk Climate Emergency Plan's key theme of reducing industrial and commercial emissions, informs a model for place-based Net Zero strategies, and generates benefits for nature-based solutions. I am delighted that these two excellent schemes will receive funding that will enable them to carry on their good work in Suffolk. Low carbon initiatives in industry have a crucial part to play in the national and global economy and the work of Suffolk Road to Net Zero is key in our commitment locally towards addressing the climate emergency that we declared in 2019. Similarly, Enabling Self-Employment is helping people who want to work for themselves. They deserve our support, particularly as our economy continues to recover from the effects of COVID-19. The £200 million from the UK Community Renewal Fund will help local areas prepare for the launch of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund in 2022, the scheme the Government says will see UK-wide funding at least match EU money, reaching around £1.5 billion a year.

Suffolk County Council investing £12.8m to decarbonise its buildings

It was announced on November 9th that properties, including fire stations and libraries, will receive investment as the council continues to drive its ambition to be Net Zero by 2030. SCC will be committing £12.8m towards reducing the carbon produced by buildings in its corporate estate. Cabinet members today (9 November 2021) approved a report to commit to this investment, as well as implementing the SCC Energy Management Strategy, as recommended by the Climate Emergency Policy Development Panel. The report that we have approved today outlines an implementation plan for how we approach reducing the carbon emitted by the hundreds of buildings we own. It is a considerable milestone in our journey to Net Zero. The detail of the plan can now be developed and our corporate property team will work with central government, partners, industry experts and our own in-house professionals. They will now develop more detailed plans to ensure we are delivering effective projects with a clear focus on value for money. We know that significant, urgent investment is needed to fund carbon reduction projects within our estate and this multi-million pound investment is an indication of our commitment. The council already has a history of providing dedicated investment to improve the energy efficiency of its buildings and services, which has led to reductions in carbon emissions in recent years. Previous projects have included replacing fossil fuel boilers with bio-mass units, installing solar panels and solar hot water systems, rainwater harvesting and updating lighting. This latest investment will also work towards reducing energy consumption across the council's buildings to mitigate the effects of increasing energy prices and associated costs. Through the Energy Management Strategy, the council will target how it can be 'smarter' with its buildings by reducing electricity consumption, reviewing the heating and cooling of its buildings, continuing its LED lighting rollout, replacing older fossil fuel boilers and generating its own energy. We have been working with partners across the county for many years to understand the impact we are having on climate change. At SCC we have introduced many projects to address our carbon emissions, and continue to source a range of other funding to support our ambitions.

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

On November 19th a public consultation was 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. 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. I am 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 www.suffolk.gov.uk/budget2022

The consultation closes on Monday 20 December 2021.

Matthew Hicks - County Councillor for the Thredling Division

Tel : 01728 628176 Mob : 07824 474741 E-mail : matthew.hicks@suffolk.gov.uk