

Bromeswell Parish Council - SCC Newsletter – December 2022

Keeping people in Suffolk warm this winter

“Suffolk Winter Warmth” provides items such as hats, gloves, scarves, blankets, duvets, baby sleep bags, hot water bottles, LED bulbs, draughtproofing and more, to households in need.

Following a successful pilot in November, Suffolk Winter Warmth launched this week. The project provides support for any household experiencing hardship and in need of support to prevent ill health and keep warm. Residents can be referred by professional or voluntary sector organisations supporting residents who are struggling to heat their homes. These organisations include: District and Borough Councils, Health Professionals, Citizens Advice and Community Groups, Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service, Rural Coffee Caravan and more.

The project is backed by £50,000 of funding from Suffolk’s Collaborative Communities Board and is co-ordinated on behalf of the whole county by East Suffolk Council.

Professional and voluntary organisations can refer residents to the scheme by visiting: [Winter warmth referral » East Suffolk Council](#).

There are also more than 250 voluntary warm spaces across Suffolk, where residents can meet up with members of the community in a warm, safe space, at no charge. A map of warm spaces in Suffolk can be found on the Rural Coffee Caravan website: <https://ruralcoffeecaravan.org.uk/map/>

Alongside this, all Suffolk Libraries will act as warm, safe spaces this winter. Information and opening times for Suffolk Libraries can be found at <https://www.suffolklibraries.co.uk/>

If your community would like to set up its own Warm Space to support local residents this winter, guidance is available from Rural Coffee Caravan and Community Action Suffolk at: <https://ruralcoffeecaravan.org.uk/winter-warmth/#warmspaces>

Further details of cost-of-living support available for Suffolk residents and organisations can be found at www.suffolk.gov.uk/costofliving

Historic half a billion-pound devolution deal hands Suffolk regeneration and skills powers to level up.

Power over its Adult Education budget will be devolved to Suffolk, so it can shape provision in a way that best suits the needs of the local community. The county will receive immediate support to build new affordable homes on brownfield sites, as well as more capital funding to improve energy efficiency in houses.

The deal will also see Suffolk County Council handed control over a £480 million investment fund – this will be guaranteed for the next thirty years. This will enable the county to drive growth and plan for the long-term with certainty as it looks to level up and unlock its full economic potential. Suffolk will also get a directly elected leader of the county council. This not only would provide a single person who is accountable to the people of Suffolk, but gives the county a local champion who can attract investment and be a stronger voice in discussions with central government.

The deal also sets out the government's plans to devolve more power to Suffolk County Council through:

- Investment: It will bring decades of funding worth £480 million to improve the lives of Suffolk's residents and spend on their local priorities.
- Housing: The deal will provide £5.8 million to regenerate brownfield land into beautiful, affordable homes and drive economic growth across the area; Suffolk will also receive greater compulsory purchase powers.
- Education: The agreement devolves the Adult Education Budget so they can shape provision in a way that best suits the needs of residents and the local Suffolk economy.
- Transport: An integrated transport settlement starting in 2024/25, to support the area to improve key transport infrastructure priorities.
- The Environment: The new deal will help Suffolk deliver on its ambitions to be the country's greenest county with £3 million to improve energy efficiency in homes.

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

"This devolution deal is the first of its kind between the Government and a county council, making it a truly historic moment for Suffolk. The deal recognises Suffolk's ambitions, would put more powers in the hands of local people and bring more than half a billion pounds of investment into the county. On the table are greater decision-making powers around transport, infrastructure, skills and more resources to help us achieve our net zero ambitions. Ultimately, this significant additional investment will improve the lives and outcomes of Suffolk's residents. Devolution is a journey, not a one-off event. This deal for Suffolk is the first step towards an exciting future for our great county. This is a 'minded to' decision and will be followed by a full public consultation where everyone will get their say.

Warning after children seen playing on frozen pond

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 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.

Record number of residents help shape county council budget

Each year, councils everywhere engage with their residents about how much money they plan to spend on public services, in order to set their annual budget. Suffolk County Council is no different with a budget that funds services from gritting roads during the winter, to providing Family Hubs and keeping the most vulnerable people safe and well. The budget for Suffolk County Council services in 2022/23 is £625 million.

Between early October and the start of December, the county council collected a total of 2,617 responses. From this feedback which was made up of a wide range of individuals, it saw that social care for both adults and children were the two top areas where people feel the council should be spending more, with mental health services the next most important area. Just behind these areas, residents want more to be spent on the county's roads and pavements and local bus services.

Within the feedback the county has seen a majority support for an increase in council tax with 48.6% stating that council tax should increase, compared with 31.8% who oppose an increase. Similarly, when asked about the specific increase in funding for adult social care, 51.7% supported an increase compared with 18.9% opposing this increase. Due to the number of residents taking part in this survey, there was a good representative view from across Suffolk, recognising that a small increase in council tax could allow the county council to continue providing the right level of service to its residents.

Newly launched focus groups also helped form part of the county council's engagement with residents, community groups and other key local representatives. This gave the county council the opportunity to discuss the pressures it faces and understand the challenges that those in Suffolk's communities are facing.

Following this, a budget proposal has now been developed with many factors in mind, such as ensuring the right level of funding is available to deliver statutory services and political priorities but also giving due consideration to the feedback received from the budget survey.

The proposals will first be considered by Suffolk County Council's Scrutiny Committee in January 2023, before being debated, and voted upon, by all Suffolk County Councillors in February 2023 (See below).

Council to protect frontline services and increase funding in budget proposal

Adult care services and children's services will receive £47m more funding as part of Suffolk County Council's £685m budget proposals, published in late December.

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.

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.

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)

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

Read [papers for the SCC Scrutiny meeting on 10 January 2023 here](#).

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