



January 2022 Town and Parish Newsletter

Children's services and adult care at the heart of Suffolk County Council's new budget plans

Suffolk County Council has outlined how it plans to spend money on public services in 2022/23.

- More money to support children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)
- Extra resources for adults in need of care
- Additional funds to prevent flooding and fix footpaths

Under the proposals, the council's budget for 2022-23 would rise by 4.5% (from £598.2 to £625.4m). This additional money is generated by a 2.99% increase in Council Tax, and an increase in grants received from the Government.

The proposals will be presented at a scrutiny meeting in January, then put forward for approval by councillors in February.

Councillor Richard Rout, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Environment at Suffolk County Council, said:

"I've worked with my colleagues to propose a budget which will not see any reductions in our services, and invests further where it is most needed. Our aim is always to provide the best possible services for everyone in Suffolk and provide value for money.

"This has been a difficult budget to consider, particularly as Covid continues to make life challenging on every level, including our finances.

"We also continue to face rising costs and hugely increasing demands on our services year on year, particularly our adult care and children's services.

"But this is a budget which helps us to respond to these demands, and meets our priorities for next year. For example increasing our family services budget by £1.1m from next year, to specifically to address the recommendations made by the recent independent SEND review – this is in addition to our previous commitment of £45m to develop SEND provision."

The council's priorities are to:

- promote and support the health and wellbeing of all people in Suffolk

- 
- strengthen the local economy
 - protect and enhance the environment
 - provide value for money for the Suffolk taxpayer

Some of the detail of the budget proposals, includes:

- £1.1m increase for the family services budget, specifically to address recommendations made by the recent independent SEND review
- £1m additional funding for Suffolk Highways over the next four years, for example to fund road signs and responsible verge cutting
- £10m to specifically deliver an increasing number of drainage schemes (over the next three years)
- £10m to improve footpath quality and access (over the next three years)
- £12.8m to decarbonise the buildings that we own (by 2030)
- Investments this year to set up future borrowing for bigger schemes, such as SEND and carbon reduction

Regarding Council Tax, the proposed 2.99% increase would be made up of a 1.99% increase in general Council Tax and a 1.00% increase dedicated to funding adult care.

This means costs for a household would look like:

- Band D property: £27.60 per week (80 pence per week increase from 2021-22)
- Band B property: £21.47 per week (62 pence per week increase from 2021-22) (Band B properties are the most common in Suffolk)

Councillor Rout continued:

“Proposing an increase in council tax is not a decision we take lightly, particularly when our costs of living are going up too.

“However, I think there is increasing recognition of the pressure our services are under. In our public consultation, there were more people who agreed that council tax would need to go up next year, compared to those that didn’t. This was especially true for funding adult care.

“By paying this extra each week, we are all helping the council to provide its key services, and helping support those who need it most.

“If anyone does have concerns about paying their council tax, they may be eligible for the Council Tax Reduction Scheme, which is managed by our borough and district councils. You could receive help if you are on a low income, even if you are working.”

The budget proposals will be presented at a Scrutiny Meeting on Tuesday 11 January 2022, with the final budget discussed at a Full Council meeting on 17 February 2022.

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



Annual Public Health Report focuses on Mental Health impact of Covid-19

On December 2nd Suffolk County Council endorsed far-reaching recommendations to improve Suffolk people's mental health and wellbeing.

This includes the creation of a dedicated fund of £2.5m and the development of a cross-system group to support community wellbeing in Suffolk.

Each year, the Director of Public Health in Suffolk produces an independent report, which explores a topic or area of strategic focus that is of importance to Suffolk. This year's report titled "Better, together: Public Mental Health in Suffolk", focuses on the actions that need to be taken to support and enable good mental health and wellbeing in the community, following the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The strains of the Covid-19 pandemic have meant that the issue of mental health has been in the public consciousness like never before. The unprecedented measures required to reduce the spread of the virus, have placed extraordinary pressures, and demands on the whole population, with around 1 in 5 adults in Britain experiencing some form of depression in the first three months of 2021 – more than double the figure prior to the pandemic. Almost half of adults have reported that their emotional and mental wellbeing has been affected.

The report highlights that those impacts may be as damaging and long-lasting as the physical effects of the virus. It focuses on actions which can be taken by communities, public and private sector organisations to try and mitigate these effects and protect and promote good public mental health in Suffolk now and for the future.

longer term recovery. The Health and Wellbeing Board will oversee this and will be discussing principles for how to deliver the recommendations at its next meeting in January.

Suffolk County Council approves extra £20m investment in highway drainage and footpaths

It was announced on December 7th that Cabinet members have committed an extra £20 million over the next three years into further improving Suffolk's highway drainage systems and footpaths.

In recognition of the increasing maintenance demand on these areas, councillors approved the use of £10 million to specifically deliver an increasing number of drainage schemes that deal with problems that affect larger numbers of people, and a further £10 million to improve footpath quality and access.

Suffolk Highways will use the drainage investment alongside funding from the Department for Transport to increase the number of highway flooding sites which are resolved, providing a highway network that is more resilient and accessible during heavy rain and severe weather events.



The footpath investment will be focused on urban areas and busy footpaths in rural areas - providing a safer and more accessible network that supports people accessing local bus services, health care services and local shopping precincts.

Significant investment in firefighting equipment secures safer future for Suffolk

On December 10th, Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service added to the lifesaving kit at its disposal – cementing the county’s continued commitment to protecting its people.

A significant investment from the service in new equipment has seen the introduction of digital radios, smoke hoods and smoke curtains – benefitting both residents and firefighters across Suffolk.

The state-of-the-art digital handheld radios offer a clearer and greater range than previous models – vastly improving communication between firefighters when attending incidents.

These are accompanied by two pieces of new equipment designed specifically to reduce the harmful impact of smoke. All fire engines will now carry escape smoke hoods – enabling firefighters to protect people when rescuing or evacuating them from fires. Smoke curtains have also been introduced to help ensure that escape routes are kept clear of smoke, while also aiding in protecting property by reducing smoke damage.

This equipment can be used in a range of incidents, with it already proving invaluable in Lowestoft earlier today, where two occupants were rescued from a property following a kitchen fire suspected to have been caused by cooking left unattended.

Over 10,000 new LED streetlights installed across Suffolk

On December 17th Suffolk’s LED replacement programme reached a new milestone, with over 10,000 streetlights upgraded with new, sustainable LEDs.

Bouygues Energies & Services, the contractor leading the programme has successfully installed 10,799 new lanterns and counting as part of the project to replace all 43,400 streetlights in the county. These lanterns use less energy and produce a more natural and focused light than the traditional orange glow of streetlights.

The project, which is due to complete by the end of 2022 will also allow opportunity for other streetlight owners within Suffolk such as Parish and District Councils to upgrade their streetlights as part of this process.

This upgrade supports Suffolk County Council’s ambitions for becoming a carbon-neutral organisation by 2030. The benefits include; supporting a reduction in carbon emissions by saving energy and reducing light pollution, as well as providing clearer images on CCTV, traffic cameras and dashcam footage for the benefit of public safety.

The teams have been working their way through the west of the county and are making progress in Stowmarket and Sudbury.

Aside from the reduction in energy usage and minimising light pollution, the project will also bring down ongoing maintenance costs for the authority. The County Council expects to



reduce its annual electricity costs on the streetlights by around 76%, saving more than £1.7 million a year.

By upgrading the lighting system with smart technology, this will increase the control the County Council has over its power consumption which will further reduce costs.

Prior to commencing in towns or parishes, Suffolk Highways is contacting those councils in case they wish to upgrade their parish-council owned street-lighting at the same time. All heritage-style lanterns which have been identified will be upgraded towards the end of the programme.

