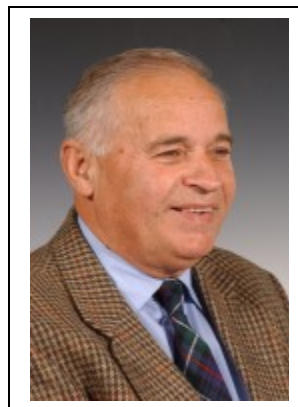


# Parish Report March 2018

## Councillor

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## Cabinet Confirms Budget Cuts

The Conservative Cabinet at Suffolk County Council confirmed the final budget proposals for 2018-19. These proposals will be debated at a Council meeting on 8 February, where all councillors will vote on them. Along with the rest of the Liberal Democrat, Green and Independent Group, I am very concerned by a number of the cuts proposed as part of the council's savings plan. These are outlined below:

### **£12m cuts to Adult Care**

The adult care budget is already very stretched, predicting a £3.47m overspend on their current 2017-18 budget. Adult social care is currently facing immense pressures, including increased demographic demand, changing customer expectations and a stressed care provider market. Despite this, the council is proposing cuts of £12m to the budget in 2018-19.

This is divided into an £11m cut from the care purchasing budget, and a £1m cut from the Sheltered Housing Grant.

### **£20,000 cut to Citizens Advice**

Cutting the budget of the valuable Citizens Advice service is a short-sighted decision, that will likely cost the council more in the long term. An analysis of the impact of Citizens Advice services shows that, for every £1 invested in 2016/17, £1.96 in savings to government and public services were generated. By intervening in problems early on, Citizens Advice helps to reduce the need for public services such as health, housing and out-of-work benefits, whilst also improving the wellbeing, participation and productivity of the people they help.

Our Citizens Advice services are reporting an increase in the number of people requiring advice and support. Now is clearly not the time to be cutting their funding.

### **£15,000 cut to Greenways Countryside Project**

The Greenways Countryside Project exists to protect and enhance the countryside in and around Ipswich, and relies on volunteers to complete its valuable conservation work. Many of these volunteers gain a strong sense of purpose from being involved in the project, and the project is a valuable resource for promoting positive mental health and wellbeing.

Greenways currently receives £15,000 funding from the County Council, which accounts for over 10% of the projects total expenditure. However, this funding will be removed entirely in the 2018-19 budget.

### **Rural transport cuts**

£150,000 will be cut from the sponsored bus services budget, which will result in a reduced number of rural bus services. I am concerned that this will target some of our most vulnerable residents and increase rural isolation. There is currently no more information on which services could be affected by this cut. However, the Council has pledged to work with local councillors on this and I will keep you updated.

## SCC will be borrowing £21m to pay for road surfacing

Suffolk County Council are planning to borrow an additional £21m over the next three years, to pay for road resurfacing. The plan is to resurface 1,000 miles of roads by March 2021. However, this accounts for only 25% of the road network in Suffolk, and so will only scratch the surface.

It is also worrying to see that the Council are planning to cut the highway maintenance budget in 2018-19. In particular, they are proposing a cut of £300,000 to the winter maintenance budget by reducing the amount of gritting carried out in the winter months. There is little point in borrowing £21m to resurface Suffolk roads, if the Council are not willing to invest the necessary funding for road maintenance.

## Increased hourly funding rate for Childcare providers

The Schools Forum recently decided that the base hourly rate for providers should increase to £4.00 (previously £3.87), whilst the amount retained by Suffolk County Council should reduce to 3.8% (6.3%).

You may remember that, back in October 2017, my group supported a motion which called on Suffolk County Council to increase the amount of funding that was passed on to providers. We also criticised the lack of transparency over how the council was spending the £2m of funding that it retained centrally.

Unfortunately, the Conservative majority refused listen to the concerns of providers, campaigners and councillors, and voted against the motion in October. They made it very clear that an increase in funding was not an option.

This change therefore is a complete U-turn by the Council, and is a step in the right direction. However, childcare providers across the county have warned us that £4.00 an hour still is not enough to keep their businesses afloat and viable in the future. More will need to be done, by Suffolk County Council and central government, to support providers if the government's "30 hour free childcare" policy is to be a success.

## Final call for feedback on proposals to change home to school transport

On Wednesday 28 February 2018 the consultation to help find a long-term solution to providing affordable home to school transport will close.

In Suffolk, £21 million of taxpayers' money is spent every year getting children to and from school. Suffolk County Council has already introduced a number of efficiency changes to the service saving around £2.6 million. Now, like many other councils across the country, the authority needs to consider making more significant changes across a number of areas, including home to school travel.

The consultation highlights the challenges faced with funding and asks residents for their thoughts on how we adapt to the changing education landscape in Suffolk as schools continue to become more independent, moving away from being historically under local authority control, with new powers to set their choice of admissions, adjust term dates and manage school travel plans.

The council's current school and post-16 travel policies go above legal requirements, the consultation seeks views on changing these policies, giving the opportunity to explore local solutions as well as three alternative options for children aged 5-16 and 16 plus.

Over 3500 people have already responded to the school and post-16 travel consultation surveys, over 151 people attended one of the consultation workshops and 36 people attended the 'Have your say' event where alternative solutions were presented.

All of the feedback gathered will be carefully and thoroughly considered by Suffolk County Council's Cabinet in June 2018. The consultation is open until **Wednesday 28 February 2018**. Full details about the proposals and how people can have their say are available at [www.suffolk.gov.uk/schooltravel](http://www.suffolk.gov.uk/schooltravel).

## Suffolk to use Drone technology to help manage blue light service incidents

15 February 2018 marks the official launch of the use of two Small Unmanned Surveillance Aircrafts in Suffolk. The technology, commonly referred to as drones have been developed and funded by Suffolk Resilience Forum for use across the county.

As part of a multi-agency Air Support Unit, the drones will be used by Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service, Suffolk Constabulary, Suffolk County Council and Suffolk Lowland Search and Rescue and Norfolk & Suffolk 4x4 Response.

The drones will provide a range of aerial surveillance options to support emergency services and voluntary organisations across a wide range of incidents including:

- large-scale open fires or complex structural fires
- urban area search and rescue
- major incident or disaster response
- investigative support
- hazardous materials response including Environmental Impact Assessments
- road traffic accidents
- significant multi-agency events

- missing persons searches
- pre-planned operations and risk information gathering

By improving the ability to see and understand what is happening from the air, the drones will support emergency services and voluntary organisations to inform the decisions they make when dealing with an incident. They will also help to reduce risks to the public and emergency service workers.

The drones and camera equipment cost around £42,500 and they are based at Woodbridge Fire and Police station, have 24/7 emergency response capability and can be used by 17 specially trained remote pilots. The drones will provide important visual information which will be used alongside experienced operational commanders to complete the decision-making picture and help resolve incidents as quickly and safely as possible.

The drones have already been used a number of times, most recently at the fire at Saxmundham train station to not only provide pictures of fire spreading and possible collapse in areas that may not have been possible for firefighters to access or see, but also to assist the joint investigation team to determine the location and possible cause of the fire