

ANNUAL PARISH REPORT 2014

Councillor

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Financial Restraint

In common with the National Economy, Local Government has been under severe financial restraint. This is not a new phenomenon! A recent study indicated that over the period of the last twenty years, under various Governments, Local Government has been the victim of the classic two pronged attack from National Government, ever increasing legislation (estimated over 15,000 pieces of new legislation enacted by National Government over 2013) and in real terms a steady reduction in financial resources to cope with the increasing burden of legislation. In terms of real investment the UK must fall very low on the European league table!

So that means, lack of investment in our infrastructure, highways and watercourses to name but two. Looking forward rather than backwards, just like the year just completed the financial future is very tough.

Savings of £38.6m have been proposed by Suffolk County Council for 2014/15 and there is no planned increase in council tax in 2014/15 so the Council will receive a grant equivalent to 1% increase in Band D council tax, which is about £2.9m. The council tax will be frozen for a fourth year for (2014/15) at 2013/14 levels puts the portion of the bill for Band D properties at £1,126.53. The police and crime commissioner has also pledged to freeze the police portion of the bill. To date the council has delivered savings in excess of £90m (since 2011/12) and the identified budget gap over the four years is forecast to be about £156m. This is equivalent to 30% of the 2013/14 budget excluding schools (£528m). All directorates are expected to plan for 30% reductions in their budgets by 2017/18 and to develop proposals to transform services to make these reductions. As a result of the work undertaken within the directorates to date, potential savings of £38.6m have been identified for 2014/15. The significant proportion of the savings for 2014/15 will be made through managing demand for care services and the new energy from waste plant.

Since April 2010 there has been a significant reduction of staff members across all directorates. Between April 2010 and the end of this financial year, 2013/14, it is expected that the workforce headcount, excluding schools, will have reduced from 10,456 to 5,156 – a change of around 51%. The change in the workforce is as a result of savings and also through implementation of alternative models of service delivery. This includes the divestment of EFMS (the schools catering and ground maintenance teams), the libraries service, Leading Lives, Realise Future, Concertus (the property division), residential care homes and the highways service. During 2014/15 there will be a transfer back to the council of approximately 700 staff as a result of the CSD contract coming to an end. There will be an initial reduction in staff members followed by further reductions in future years through transformation of services to deliver further savings.

Government confirms more funding for Broadband

Suffolk has been awarded almost £5 million of extra Government funding to help make high speed fibre broadband available to the hardest to reach communities. Today's announcement means that the Better Broadband for Suffolk programme, currently working to make superfast speeds (24 megabits per second or more) available to 85% of the county, can start working towards a higher target of up to 95%. All properties in Suffolk have been promised speeds of at least 2 megabits per second.

The funding comes from the Government's Superfast Extension Programme – designed to give 95% of the UK access to superfast broadband by 2017. Suffolk has been allocated £4.82 million.

Welcoming the news, Suffolk County Council leader and chair of the Better Broadband for Suffolk programme, Councillor Mark Bee, said:

“This additional funding is excellent news and means we can start work on significantly extending the commitments we have made under the current Better Broadband for Suffolk programme. In particular, we're going to be able to make high speed broadband available to more of Suffolk's hardest to reach rural communities. We're only half a year into the delivery of the Better Broadband for Suffolk Programme and we're already looking at how we can take it to the next level. Our current commitment to making superfast speeds available to 85% of Suffolk homes and businesses is only the beginning. We want to push forward so that even more people are able to benefit. I'm looking forward to this additional work getting underway and the day that slow, or non-existent internet speeds are a thing of the past in Suffolk”.

In January 2014, Suffolk County Council announced that it was inviting potential suppliers to discuss how they could deliver the additional work. A 'mini-competition' - separate to the current Better Broadband for Suffolk contract with BT – is now underway to identify a suitable supplier. As part of the new tendering process, Suffolk County Council is conducting a review of the open market to establish what broadband coverage commercial providers are planning to deliver. Following consultation, this information will be used to define the areas where the additional public funding can be invested. Officials aim to complete the tendering process by the summer of 2014, and for works to start by the end of 2014 - in parallel with the on-going Better Broadband for Suffolk programme. Announcing the funding, culture secretary, Maria Miller MP, said:

“Superfast Broadband will benefit everyone in Suffolk - whether they need it for work, to do homework or simply to download music or films. Thousands of homes and businesses now have access and it is helping people with their everyday tasks. We want to make sure that Britain is one of the best countries in the world for broadband, and the extra £250 million we are investing will help ensure communities around the UK are not left behind in the digital slow lane.”

Locality Budget

Funds from Locality Budget for Melford Ward, which includes Long Melford, Glemsford, Hartest, Lawshall and groups based in Sudbury serving these parishes have been distributed as below;

Long Melford received grants to the Heritage Centre, Primary School, British Legion, Friends of Holy Trinity Church, Village Hall, Over 60's, LMOS (Country Park), Cricket club and Parish Council for Christmas Lights and Tourist Information Boards

Lawshall received grants for the youth club and repairs to play equipment

Glemsford Gardening club received a grant for seeds and planting

Hartest school received a grant for a cooker

Sudbury received grants for Go Start and Sudbury Rowing Club

Committed grants awaiting payment are Glemsford guides and scouts and Sudbury Gateway and the Carnival Committee together totaling £ 1,000 leaving a balance of £5,733

Thank you

I would like to take this opportunity to extend my thanks to all the people who help me in this role of County Councillor including Parish Councils, District Councillors and Parish Clerks to name but a few.