

Parish Report APM 2013

Councillor

Richard Kemp

Tresco
New Road
Long Melford
Suffolk
CO10 9JY
01787 378149
richard.kemp@suffolk.gov.uk



Another year has passed, and yet many of the themes remain the same. Local Government funding is decreasing; Council's have to choose what their priorities are, and find innovative ways of continuing to provide frontline services. As well as this, there is continued leadership from Cllr Mark Bee, and the Chief Executive Deborah Cadman. However, there is one major difference this year in that on May 2nd Suffolk goes to the polls. It will be extremely interesting to see the political make up of the authority once the County has spoken.

Budget 2013

As expected, there was a further reduction in Government grants to the County Council this year. In total, the Council had to save £24.9m, as part of a two year programme to reduce the budget by just over £50m. As was the case in 2012, the budget focused on making efficiencies rather than specific service cuts. This is concerning as there is no way to measure how much these reductions affect the frontline services.

Saving Ref.	Task	Saving 2013-14 (£'m)
A	Improve efficiency and remove unnecessary processes across the organisation	9.7
B	Reduce management costs across the organisation	0.5
C	Rationalise office accommodation	1.3
D	Share of profits from Eastern Facilities Management Solutions Ltd.	0.2
E	Redesign home to school transport	0.2
F	Target resources in children's services to reduce demand	2.5
G	Change the relationship with schools	0.2
H	Adult Care in Depth Review	7.0
I	Reduce expenditure on library services	0.3
J	Re-let the highways contract	2.0
K	Work with District/Borough Councils to reduce costs of Suffolk-wide waste services	0.8
L	Reduce the number of uniformed fire fighters	0.2
	TOTAL	24.9

The vast majority of the savings came from two directorates. The first being Adult and Community Services where £7m will be saved as part of an in-depth review, and the second being £2.5m from Children and Young People's Services. In addition to these listed savings, there are further efficiencies taken from across the County Council which total £9.7m (including further money from ACS and CYP).

At the Full Council meeting where the budget is discussed, an amendment was submitted by the Liberal Democrat Group. The amendment included –

- Increasing the funding for school improvement services by employing more advisers, and increasing the support to schools.
- Attracting more foster carers to a pioneering scheme for the most vulnerable children in Suffolk.
- Reinstate the Speed limits team at Suffolk County Council to allow communities to apply for 20 mph schemes once again.

This amendment, which would have been funded by the contingency reserve, was defeated by the Conservative majority. The budget as proposed by the Conservative majority was agreed by 39 votes to 11.

If you wish to see a copy of the budget reports sent to Cabinet and Full Council please head to - <http://committeeminutes.suffolkecc.gov.uk/meeting.aspx?d=29/Jan/2013&c=The%20Cabinet>

Education in Suffolk

This past year has been quite a shocking for education in Suffolk for a number of reasons.

The last phase of the Schools Organisational Review in Stowmarket and Stowupland was agreed only recently, with many parents asking questions of Cabinet members at both Full Council and Cabinet meetings. In addition to this a request for further scrutiny of this plan by the Liberal Democrats, which would create a split site school, was turned down by the County Council.

Earlier in 2012, an independent commission was last year to look into the educational attainment, aspiration and employability In Suffolk.

This was as a result of Suffolk GCSE results lagging four percentage points below the national average. Matthew Taylor the CEO of the Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufacture and Commerce (RSA) and former prime ministerial advisor, has been tasked with improving educational attainment in Suffolk. The work will and has involved spending time working with employers in Suffolk and head teachers. It is expected that the commission will report back in May 2013.

After the announcement of the Raising the Bar initiative, it was revealed that Suffolk had dropped even further down the national league tables when compared with other education authorities. The County Council is now 142nd out of 151 for GCSE results nationally, and third from bottom nationally for Primary Schools.

New Head of Children's Services

Suffolk County Council employed a permanent head of Children's Services towards the end of 2012, after Simon White the temporary Director left to be the new head of a privatised service running Sandwell Council's Children Services.

Sue Cook, the former interim Corporate Director at Southend-on-Sea Borough Council, has now been in place at the Council for a few months and brings with her 30 years experience of working in Local Government and the voluntary sector, including roles at Essex County Council.

Better Broadband for Suffolk

In 2012 Suffolk County Council and other public sector organisations from the County submitted a bid to the Government to seek matched funding to help improve broadband in the county.

The Counties bid, whilst at first rejected due to lack of investment, was accepted and so discussions with private companies to do the work began. Eventually BT Openreach proved successful, and contracts were signed just prior to Christmas. This means that BT Openreach are now surveying the locations around the County for implementing faster broadband speeds, with some properties possibly receiving this in the autumn.

In just three years, it is expected that around 9 out of 10 Suffolk properties will be able to receive speeds of at least 2Mbps.

Return of the eXplore Card?

At the beginning of 2013, the County Council Cabinet announced that it was going to start to look into re-introducing a youth travel card.

The eXplore card had previously been cut in the 2011 budget, as part of the Conservatives New Strategic Direction. The decision to remove it caused significant hardship for many aged between 16-19, increasing the costs of not only travelling to college, but also work and social activities. Petitions and campaigns were launched for its return, with Cllr Carole Page and the Lib Dem Group being at the forefront of this.

This new card will go some way to reduce this cost, with discussions still ongoing with bus companies to provide a universal discount of approximately 20-25%. There are concerns that this card won't be available on all buses in Suffolk, which could hugely disadvantage students in certain parts of the County.

Fire merger investigated then rejected

As you may well recall, Suffolk County Council discussed at length over a few months the possibility of the Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service and Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Fire Authority merging on a voluntary basis by 2014/15

This took place because of the possible savings that had been identified early on, with the County Council even holding a public consultation over the Christmas period. However, after the announcement that Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Fire Authority could increase their precept by a higher amount, both parties decided that the financial benefits would not be sufficient to proceed.

There may well be further opportunities in the future to work voluntarily together.

County Care Homes to be Divested

In October the administration, at Cabinet, voted to divest the Council of its care homes. This means that the County Council has passed over its 16 care homes and 8 wellbeing centres to Care UK or its funding partner as part of a 25 year contract to provide care.

The decision also includes an estate development plan, which commits Care UK to provide 10 new purpose built care homes and 10 community wellbeing centres, many of which will be in different locations to the current homes, with the old sites being handed back to the County. The County Council has also passed on eight sites for these new care homes which due the reduced financial burden on Care UK will result in a lower bed prices in the future.

Police and Crime Panel

This was also the year that the Police and Crime Commissioner role began, and the Suffolk Police Authority was abolished. On the 15th of November Suffolk elected Tim Passmore as their PCC.

As part of this change, the County Council picked up an additional responsibility, in being the host of the Police and Crime Panel. This is made up of Councillors from each of the authorities to both scrutinise and support the PCC.

If you would like more information on the Panel, including membership, meeting dates across the year, please head to this address - <http://www.suffolk.gov.uk/your-council/decision-making/committees/police-and-crime-panel-joint-committee/>

Libraries – Industrial and Provident Society

On the 1st of August the new Library service was launched with the Industrial and Provident Society taking responsibilities from the County Council. The IPS now runs all of the 44 Libraries in Suffolk, as well as the mobile library, school, and prison services.

This move, according to the administration, is a way to ensure all libraries remain open with paid staff. There have been a number of claims about the level of savings that are required across the Library service, most recently there were claims that £100,000 had to be saved from as yet unspecified areas. Originally the County Council claimed that in setting up an IPS there could be an 80% saving on business rates, and then a request of a 5% saving per Library.

It is concerning that the funding for the Library service will only be protected for a total of two years.