

Parish Report May 2012

Councillor

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Scrutiny Committee

The next Scrutiny Committee will take place on the 1st of May, and cover two very important issues, firstly the Suffolk Circle, a scheme attempting to grow social networks with the elderly, and Demand Responsive Transport, the rural replacement for the bus services that were cut at the 2011 budget.

Suffolk Circle

The Suffolk Circle has now been running for a year, and this paper allows the Committee to scrutinise its progress. The Suffolk Circle, costing £780,000 in total, and devised by Participle, aims to increase the level of social interaction between its elderly members and provide help based on a purchased token scheme. In order to be part of the Suffolk Circle you must pay an annual membership fee, which currently stands at £30. In order to use one of the helpers (maintenance, TV, gardening etc.), or attend one of the priced events, members must buy tokens at a cost of £6/£5 each.

The paper reviews the progress to date after its first year of operation; it also includes the originally confidential paper provided to Cabinet on the 25th of May 2010 which agreed to fund the programme. Interesting points to note are that:

- The Suffolk Circle has not reached its membership target for the first year, achieving only 90% - 362 current members – 404 target members.
- Whilst the Suffolk Circle is only operating in West Suffolk, they will be moving to South Suffolk this year, which includes Ipswich, Hadleigh, Debenham and Aldeburgh – they have a membership target in the second year of 1,630 – 4.5 times the amount they have got this year, and haven't outlined what their plans are to attract this number.
- The Suffolk Circle is currently charging £30 per year for membership, when the original financial plan was to charge between £30 and £75 per quarter – no update as to the financial viability of the project, just the continued funding.
- The number of men who have joined as members is significantly less than that of women who have joined.

Demand Responsive Transport

This paper reviews all of the DRT services the County currently runs and will eventually include the feedback from the brief questionnaire which closed last week. The service, which has to be booked a day in advance, operates within a defined area, providing a service from door to door, or to enable individuals to link up with other forms of public transport. The DRT areas usually operate between 7am and 7pm Monday-Friday/Saturday, with fares structured in a similar way to the buses that preceded them.

The issues that are of particular concern are:

- The requirement to book the day before to travel – what about those urgent journeys to the doctors, hospital or socialising?
- Can't be block booked, removing the ability to use it as a commuting or school service.
- The fact that the booked times may be altered if the bus has to pick other members of the public up, potentially leading to missed onward connections.
- Lack of availability at the weekend, or the evening, which reduces social mobility.

I will inform you at the next Parish Meeting as to the recommendations made at the Scrutiny Committee and any important information about these two services. In the meantime, if you wish to read the reports for the Scrutiny Committee please head to;

<http://committeeminutes.suffolkcc.gov.uk/meeting.aspx?d=01/May/2012&c=Scrutiny%20Committee>

Cabinet

The last Cabinet meeting took place on the 17th of April, in Bury St. Edmunds. On the agenda was the important item of the future of Suffolk County Council Care Homes.

It was announced on the day that Care UK would be the Cabinet's preferred bidder to run the 16 Residential Care Homes and eight Community Wellbeing Centres.

The paper did not include information of why they were selected, merely the process to which they had been selected by. More interestingly, members of the public who were present and were involved in the process of providing feedback to the administration regarding which provider to select were very surprised at the decision to choose Care UK. They provided a number of examples where they believed that the other bidder in the process would have been a better option.

In addition to this the Cabinet received a paper updating the position of the New Heritage Organisation for Suffolk. The Cabinet received the recommendations from the Scrutiny Committee, and allowed for further investigations to be made into partnerships and funding availability. There are still concerns about the potential location of a New Heritage Organisation, and the serious complications that have arisen since the start of this project, but a consensus that digitisation of the records is ultimately a positive step.

If you would like to view a copy of the reports sent to Cabinet, please use the link below;
<http://committeeminutes.suffolkcc.gov.uk/meeting.aspx?d=17/Apr/2012&c=The%20Cabinet>

Home to School Transport Consultation

Suffolk County Council has recently launched a public consultation on home to school transport due to the introduction of Free Schools in the County.

Legislation requires that Free Schools are provided with the same transport as Council run schools and whilst there will be an interim solution for 2012/13; the County needs to provide a longer term solution.

Since the introduction of a Free School at Clare, as well as other parts of the County, the Council is seeking the public's view on proposals for how the home-to-school arrangements for beyond next year.

Documents including the proposals for the areas that currently have, or will have free schools can be found on the Suffolk County Council website, which can be found here - <http://www.suffolk.gov.uk/your-council/decision-making/consultations/home-to-school-consultation/>

All responses must be received by the 1st of June, and there will be public meetings in local schools on the following dates;

Stour Valley Community School – Tuesday 8th of May
Samuel Ward Academy – Tuesday 15th May
Sudbury Upper School – Tuesday 22nd May

Full Council

Just to remind you all, that the next Full Council will be on the 24th of May. This will be the annual meeting where the Chairman and Committee places are suggested; I will let you know at the next Parish meeting the outcome.