

Bawdsey Annual Parish Meeting SCC News Highlights from 2014/15

SCC freezes council tax for fifth year in a row

SCC's share of council tax was frozen in February for a fifth year in a row. This means that Suffolk residents will not pay any more than they did in 2010/11. The council has successfully delivered savings in excess of £130m over the last four years. However, with the government's deficit reduction programme set to continue until at least 2018/19, there is a forecast of a further £120m budget shortfall that will need to be addressed over the next three years. The Council tax freeze was agreed as part of the budget proposals for 2015/16, which includes savings of £38.2million, to be made across services delivered by the council during the financial year 2015/16. The bulk of these savings (£24.6m) will be delivered through wide-ranging transformation programmes which will result in the council becoming a leaner and more focused organisation. The remaining savings will be made by reducing previous contingency budgets, set aside for major projects and change management as well as making other budgetary savings from within service areas. Meanwhile, over the last five years, there has been a reduction of around 47% in workforce numbers across council services.

Suffolk schools' ascent of league tables confirmed

Figures released in January confirmed the trend of improvement in Suffolk's relative position in educational attainment. Suffolk has climbed 12 places in the national league table for GCSE results since the previous year; from 137th to 125th out of 151 local authorities. This means we are getting closer to bridging the gap between ourselves and the national average. This was always expected to be a tough year for results, on account of changes to the way GCSEs are measured nationally. As a result, there was a nationwide reduction in the level of results. In Suffolk this meant that just over half (51.7%) of pupils scored at least five C grades including English and maths last summer, compared with a higher number of 54.6% in 2013. However, the key statistic is the relative improvement of Suffolk, something which is now becoming a clear trend. In 2012, Suffolk had fallen 8.9% behind the national average at GCSE, prompting the establishment of the Raising the Bar programme. Since then, there has been slow but inexorable improvement, with the gap between Suffolk and the national average narrowing to 4.6% in 2013, and now, following 2014's results, to just 1.7%.

Big improvements in early years and Key Stage 1 results

The number of Suffolk's three to seven year olds achieving expected levels of attainment has improved significantly. New statistics released earlier this year by the Department for Education indicate an improvement in early years and Key Stage 1 attainment and, therefore, an upward surge in Suffolk's position in national league tables. Suffolk has made a big improvement of 10% in their Early-Years Foundation-Stage Profile (EYFSP). This means there are 10% more children in Suffolk achieving a good level of development in 2014 (59%) than in 2013 (49%). The step up in progress has resulted in Suffolk moving up five places in the local authority early-years league tables to 85th place. Part of the increase is down to boys' literacy, which has moved up 13 places in local authority rankings to 79. The literacy of boys in Suffolk is now higher than nationally. The figures for Key Stage 1 show: reading is up 17 places, from 78% reaching expected levels of attainment (ELA) in 2013 to 81% this year; writing is up 14 places, from 68% reaching ELA in 2013 to 71% this year; maths is up three places, from 78% reaching ELA in 2013 to 80% this year; by the end of Year 2 the percentage of pupils who have met the phonics standard is up from 84% in 2013 to 89% this year. This moves the LA ranking by 41 places. These results mean that Suffolk has now either met or exceeded national figures for Key Stage 1.

Suffolk first in the country to extend Better Broadband BDUK programme

Plans to extend the roll-out of super-fast broadband to more households and business were signed in late October. SCC and BT signed a contract, under the Government's Broadband Delivery UK (BDUK) programme, to continue working together on the provision of a fibre network for Suffolk. The project will use public and private funds to deliver a fibre network to parts of the county not covered by previous plans. The contract signing took place at Endeavour House in Ipswich and was attended by SCC leader Mark Bee, BT's Bill Murphy, Managing Director, Next Generation Access, and Mark Pendlington, Chair of New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership; senior officers from the county council and BT, and county councillors. Along with other commercial and existing programmes, the contract aims to extend the coverage of fibre broadband to 95% of homes and businesses in Suffolk. The £15m capital grant from BDUK will be locally matched by £5m from the New Anglia LEP's Local Growth Fund and £10m from SCC. The roadside fibre broadband cabinets that are being connected to the network serve very localised areas, so not all parts of the towns and villages where they are located will be able to receive fibre broadband initially. As the service becomes increasingly available, people should use the 'Better Broadband for Suffolk' website (www.betterbroadbandsuffolk.com) to check to see if their home or business can receive faster broadband services.

Drive to create 5,000 new apprenticeships to address skills shortage

A £1.5million campaign aimed at doubling the number of apprenticeships in Suffolk and creating thousands of new jobs and training opportunities for young people was launched in 2014. SCC and the New Anglia LEP are leading the programme, and are calling on employers to help create the new apprenticeships that will secure the aimed-for 5,000 new opportunities by 2019. Increasing the number of apprenticeships will play a vital part in tackling the skills shortage in Suffolk and creating a more successful and sustainable economy. *As cabinet member for education and skills, Lisa Chambers, said:* "Apprenticeships are already thriving in Suffolk. We want to make more people aware of the fantastic range of opportunities on offer across the county and encourage more employers to consider how hiring an apprentice could benefit their business. There has never been a better time to think about an apprenticeship and over the next three years, we will be investing £1.5m to make it as easy as possible to employ an apprentice or start an apprenticeship."

UK's first Youth Employment Centre opens in Suffolk

The UK's first-ever dedicated youth employment centre opened in December in Ipswich. The MyGo centre will offer all 16-24 year olds in Ipswich and the surrounding area free training, career and employment support. The project is funded through the Greater Ipswich City Deal - the government's flagship programme to devolve power to local authorities and businesses to put them in control of economic opportunities and challenges. It will be staffed by Jobcentre Plus, EOS and Tomorrows People employees working together in an integrated manner so that young people can access all the help they need in one place. Speaking about the new centre, SCC's cabinet member for education and skills said: "This presents our local young people an important opportunity not yet available to anyone else in the country. It is vital that we capture the attention of all young adults locally, explore their interests and build on their talents, better to prepare them for the world of education, training or work. Through the Raising the Bar initiative we've identified the importance of young people learning about the wide range of local career options available to them. I very much look forward to seeing the benefits this innovative centre will bring to Ipswich and the surrounding area."

Multi-million-pound investment in skills secured

Businesses and local councils are joining forces with the government to invest more than £18 million in equipping people with the skills local businesses need.

The investment will be used to fund projects set out in the Greater Ipswich City Deal including a new youth employment centre in Ipswich and an incentive scheme to encourage businesses to invest in training. The announcement follows a successful bid led by Ipswich Building Society and supported by SCC as part of the government's Employer Ownership Pilot to secure a £5 million grant that will be used in conjunction with other financial commitments agreed in the Greater Ipswich City Deal. The money includes at least £4.5million to be invested in skills and training by local businesses in Suffolk and Norfolk and will fund employer-designed projects that will aim to halve youth unemployment in the Greater Ipswich area over the next two years.

Norfolk's waste to create energy in Suffolk

The landmark deal between Norfolk and Suffolk has been honoured, and waste began arriving at the Great Blakenham site in September. The agreement between our two counties will see 40,000 tonnes of Norfolk's residual household waste – the rubbish left after recycling – used to generate electricity at Suffolk's new energy-from-waste (EFW) plant in Great Blakenham. Both councils stand to make savings of around £1 million each from the two-year deal. SCC stands to benefit from economies of scale, because sending more waste to the EFW will reduce the treatment cost per tonne. It will also help reduce contract management costs. Norfolk County Council's savings will come from reducing its landfill costs. These new savings come on top of the £8million a year that the EFW is expected to save for Suffolk's tax payers. The EFW was designed to handle up to 269,000 tonnes of waste each year. With SCC committed to sending 170,000 tonnes for treatment – there is capacity to take more waste from local councils and private companies in eastern England. Provision was always there for this spare capacity to be made up from elsewhere in the region. Signing this agreement with Norfolk, however, means that both counties benefit financially.

Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service celebrates 40 years

Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) hosted its annual awards ceremony in September. With Her Majesty's Lord-Lieutenant of Suffolk, the High Sheriff, county councillors and the Mayor of Ipswich in attendance, SFRS celebrated the achievements, bravery and dedication of firefighters, members of the public and staff across the council's public protection team. The evening featured displays of equipment, fire engines and uniforms depicting SFRS over the last 40 years. Highlights of the awards presented include, the award for 'Best Fire Station', which was won by Clare Fire Station who celebrated their 60th anniversary earlier this year. 'Volunteer of the Year' awards went to Roger Mouncher, who has been a campaigner for home safety in the Haverhill area as well as providing support for other projects. An Excellence in Community Safety Award was awarded to Rhoda Staley for her commitment and outstanding work as a Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service Community Safety Volunteer in the Beccles area. Certificates of Merit for bravery were awarded to members of the public such as Mark Thompson in recognition of his life saving actions at a road traffic accident and Jordan Moye for his swift actions during a fire at his family home earlier this year.

Suffolk's blue-light partnership awarded nearly £5million in funding

A government grant awarded in late 2014 will help increase the number of shared bases in Suffolk for fire, police and ambulance services. The grant of £4.94 million follows the submission of a joint-bid, led by SCC's Fire and Rescue Service, earlier in the year to the Department of Communities and Local Government. As Colin Spence, SCC's cabinet

member for public protection, said: “Over the last two years, we have worked with our partners to create four shared fire and police stations which are located in Ixworth, Elmswell, Debenham and Framlingham. Ambulance crews are now based at fire stations in Lowestoft and Brandon. This national funding will support the co-location of our front-line blue-light services at further locations across Suffolk. Work will continue to establish the possibility of further shared blue-light bases across the county.” The national funding will be provided in 2015 to help establish more shared bases in Suffolk. The collaborative approach creates long-term financial savings for all parties and it will help the partners work more closely together in the community. The potential three-year programme could bring the number of blue-light shared fire stations to 12 out of a total of 35 Fire and Rescue Service buildings.

County Council pledge to tackle mental health

Mark Bee, leader of SCC, and Deborah Cadman, the council’s chief executive, signed the Time to Change Organisational Pledge. The Time to Change organisational pledge, signed on World Mental Health Day, is a public statement of aspiration that as an organisation, Suffolk County Council will tackle mental health stigma and discrimination. The council has submitted an action plan to Time to Change which demonstrates how this pledge will be carried out. Signing the pledge, Mark said: “This is a significant step forward for Suffolk County Council, as we aspire to eradicate discrimination and the stigma of mental ill-health. We are now firmly aligned with Time to Change, England's biggest programme to challenge mental health stigma and discrimination. We have come a long way with regard to mental health positive awareness, and there is still a journey to undertake, but we will work to achieve this collaboratively as a strong organisation and will strive to ensure that equality and inclusion underpins everything we do.” A day of events which featured this year’s theme of schizophrenia was also held at various council offices to mark World Mental Health Day. Local specialist organisations were invited in to showcase the services they offer as well as offer taster sessions in various therapies. Drop in counselling sessions were also available with a counsellor from SuffolkMIND.

Stay Safe Scheme badges launched across Suffolk

Suffolk’s Hate Crime Service and partnership organisations launched Stay Safe badges to help support vulnerable adults. The Stay Safe Scheme was developed to enable vulnerable people to feel safer when out and about by providing them with places they can go to, should they need help or support. These individuals are given a Stay Safe card which folds up to credit card size. This includes their name, relevant information regarding their health, how they communicate and any emergency contacts. Suffolk Police has supported Stay Safe by producing more Stay Safe cards, stickers and funding the Stay Safe badge, which will help identify these vulnerable ones. Those out in the community who may feel vulnerable are urged to look out for a Stay Safe sticker; they can then enter the place and seek refuge. The staff may find somewhere they can sit quietly or phone an emergency contact that may be able to meet them and take them home. If required they will also call emergency services. Businesses involved include libraries, leisure centres, shops, restaurants, banks and pubs. Anyone can join the scheme by displaying an A5 Stay Safe window sticker clearly in their main window. Suffolk Hate Crime Service will be happy to provide advice and information on the scheme. A full list of Stay Safe Places can be found at www.suffolkhatecrime.org.uk or phone 01473 668966.

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