

Leader of Suffolk County Council Report

Date: February 2021

1. Suffolk County Council increases budget to support most vulnerable residents and county's recovery from Covid-19

Suffolk County Council has agreed its budget for 2021/22.

Following approval of its annual budget, Suffolk County Council is increasing its planned spending once again in 2021/22 to £597.9million, some £41million (7.4%) more than 2020/21. As part of this, the council will be spending £15.3million to address its ongoing Covid-19 costs, arising from the continuing local response to the pandemic. There are no proposed reductions in council services or personnel in 2021/22.

This year's budget is based on a 12-month financial settlement from government, rather than the 3 or 4 year agreement which is usually offered.

Throughout the Covid-19 pandemic over the last 11 months or so, the Government has continued to support local authorities as they adapt to serve communities, redeploy staff into alternative specialist roles and see income streams such as business rates and council tax reduce significantly. Suffolk County Council has received around £82.2 million in financial support during 2020 to meet Covid-19 related costs and whilst the challenges of continuing to respond, and in time recover, from Covid-19 remain, significant financial pressures will continue.

The council's income from council tax is going to be £7.9 million less than expected in 2021/22 and this shortfall will be met by using council reserves. Reserves can only be spent once and do not represent a viable long term financial solution. This effective use of reserves is made possible because Suffolk County Council has maintained a consistent approach to managing its finances effectively for a number of years, holding a proportionate level of reserves for this exact situation.

In 2021/22, general Council Tax will rise by 1.99 per cent, which represents an increase of £26.68 for a Band D property, from £1,224.70 in 2020, to £1,251.38. There is also a two per cent rise in the Social Care Precept for the forthcoming year as the council recognises the ongoing challenges with meeting the rising costs and rising demand for adult care services. This means a Band D property will see an overall rise of £53.55 this year for Suffolk County Council's element of their Council Tax bill, from £1,343.61 in 2020-21 to £1,397.16 in 2021-22.

It is fair to say that the pandemic this year has also significantly impacted the expected progress of the council's recognised transformation programmes, as it has been absolutely necessary to focus on community resilience. This has included redeploying staff into bespoke roles such as procuring personal protective equipment (PPE) to support Suffolk's care sector and adapting working practices for frontline staff to maintain effective social distancing measures. As a result, the council is expecting a shortfall of around £7.8 million in projected savings for 2021. Whilst this means that further work is needed to identify potential future programmes of work,

many of the new ways of working adopted by the council during 2020 because of the pandemic may actually offer potential alternative transformation savings as the organisation continues to adapt and tailor the way it works to deliver services for Suffolk's communities.

As part of the meeting, the council's Business Plan for 2021/22 was approved which draws attention to the ambitions for the authority over the next 12 months and its commitment to four key priorities:

- Living with Covid-19 and Suffolk's recovery
- Inclusive Growth
- Health, Care and Wellbeing
- Efficient and Effective Public Services

Throughout the business plan the Council presents its environmental thread demonstrating the range of projects and commitments in place as part of addressing the climate emergency that was declared in 2019. This includes details of the Council setting its Carbon Budget and the related work involved in achieving net zero carbon emissions by 2030.

Download the Business Plan:

<https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/assets/council-and-democracy/our-aims-and-transformation-programmes/suffolk-county-council-business-plan-2021-2022.pdf>

2. Suffolk Advice and Support Service

As part of the response to the COVID-19 outbreak there has been a joint response between a number of statutory and voluntary sector partners co-ordinated by the Collaborative Communities Board. There is a clear need to provide ongoing support to the Suffolk population both in response to Covid-19 and to meet wider support needs.

The Suffolk Advice and Support Service will bring together five **essential** areas of work.

1. Single Point of Access
2. Local Welfare Assistance Scheme
3. Food banks
4. Suffolk InfoLink
5. The Warm Handover

[Download COVID19 and benefit and housing factsheet](#)

For further details on advice and support available: [Suffolk Advice and Support Service | Suffolk County Council](#)

3. New levels of digital connectivity

Suffolk County Council launched a new initiative on Friday 19th February 2021, deploying 'gateways' to build a network that covers all of Suffolk.

This will enable individuals or organisations to measure things like temperature, sound and movement via sensors linked to the Long Range Wide Area Network (LoRaWAN).

The network is being built in partnership with Norfolk County Council and funded by the New Anglia LEP. Once finished, the network will be made up of almost 100 'gateways' or data receivers and transmitters fitted to public sector buildings across the county. This will make Suffolk's rollout part of the largest free to use LoRaWAN deployment in the UK. Norfolk County Council launched its part of the network last September.

Businesses and individuals can buy their own sensors, adapt them to measure different things like visitor numbers, weather data and temperature, and tap into the gateways for free.

4. Highways doubles drainage budget following £27.2m announcement.

Suffolk Highways has allocated an extra £2m to support the fight against flooding. Drainage and flooding, Rights of Way bridges and resurfacing of roads in Suffolk have been allocated extra funds for the 2021/22 financial year following Department for Transport's funding announcement.

Keen to progress more drainage schemes across Suffolk to support the fight against flooding, Suffolk Highways has allocated an extra £2m – double its current budget allocation – in order to help tackle the worsening flood problems being experienced across the county.

Suffolk Highways also looks set to bolster its resource to support in the repairing or replacement of seven Rights of Way bridges across the county with an additional £800k, whilst committing a further £3.4m to the county's surface dressing programme.

Although the budget is less than the 2020/21 allocation, Suffolk Highways prudently prepared for a decrease and allocated a tentative £21m for the 2021/22 financial year.

5. Gull Wing

Work is now underway on two new bridges on the East Anglian coast, promising to bring huge economic benefits locally.

The Third River Crossing in Great Yarmouth is managed by Norfolk County Council, and the Gull Wing project in Lowestoft by Suffolk County Council. The projects are just 10 miles apart and have a combined cost of £246m.

The UK Government acknowledged the two bridges as nationally important infrastructure projects, with the Department for Transport committing a combined total of over £170million to both ventures.

Farrans, one of the UK's leading building and civil engineering contractors, is involved with the construction of both projects. In Great Yarmouth, the construction is a joint venture with BAM Nuttall, and in Lowestoft it is the sole responsibility of Farrans.

Road closures for both projects have already been implemented as preparation work gets underway. The Third River Crossing in Great Yarmouth will start demolition of some buildings and structures later this month (February 2021) and trial holes for utilities are underway for the Gull Wing in Lowestoft.

For further information about the Gull Wing: [Gull Wing Lowestoft \(gullwingbridge.co.uk\)](http://gullwingbridge.co.uk)

6. Asymptomatic testing centres open in Lowestoft

A testing centre has opened in Lowestoft using lateral flow testing to identify people who may have coronavirus but who are asymptomatic – crucial in stopping the spread of the virus as the UK vaccination programme is rolled out.

The centre is for anyone living or working in the town and surrounding area who are unable to work from home. Employers are also being urged to encourage their staff to book regular for testing.

The facility is at Kirkley & Pakefield FC clubhouse in Walmer Road and opened on Friday 5 February 2021.

The centre is operated on behalf of Suffolk County Council (SCC). Both will operate seven days a week between 7am and 6pm. Tests should be booked in advance. The launch follows the opening of the first centre at the University of Suffolk in Ipswich, then at The STEM Innovation Campus West Suffolk College in Western Way, Bury St Edmunds.

Lateral flow testing involves taking a swab from the throat and nose to see whether coronavirus is present in the body.

The person tested will then receive a text message giving the result within an hour. Anyone giving a positive test will be told to self-isolate and advised on what to do next.

People are being asked to get tested twice a week, three to four days apart, as part of their weekly routine.

Anyone receiving a negative result needs to continue to follow the social distancing guidance as they may only be at the early stages of developing the virus. This is in case levels of the virus in a person at the earlier test were too low to be detected at that time.

The centres are being run by contractors Commisceo on behalf of SCC through government funding. [Appointments for tests can be made through registering on the booking website](#) or calling **0333 772 6144**.

The centres are only for people not showing symptoms of Covid-19. Anyone who is showing symptoms, or who may have been in close contact with someone who has, should not visit the centre. Instead, they should ring 119 or go to the NHS website to book a test at one of the 12 symptomatic testing sites in Suffolk. [For more details about testing go to the Suffolk County Council website](#).

7. The development sites are to the north Lowestoft adjacent to the A47

A public consultation was launched on 04 January 2021 until 15th February 2021 to gain the views of local residents on the initial proposals for the site allocated for up to 1,300 homes (adopted East Suffolk Council Waveney Local Plan 2019), including areas for development, access and movement for vehicles, pedestrians and cyclists, green spaces and key design principles. The consultation was held virtually due to the coronavirus restrictions.

There will be further opportunities for the public to have their say later in 2021 when the final masterplans are published, and beyond this, when planning applications are submitted.

Read more about the land development: [Land North of Lowestoft – Virtual Consultation Website](#)