

Cllr Matthew Hicks 2015 Annual Report for the Thredling Division

SCC freezes council tax for fifth year in a row

SCC's share of council tax has been frozen 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 include 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 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.

UK's first Youth Employment Centre opens in Suffolk

The UK's first-ever dedicated youth employment centre has opened in Ipswich. The MyGo centre offers 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." Outreach services will also be provided from mid-2015 across greater Ipswich, including those living in Babergh, Mid Suffolk and Suffolk Coastal.

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, figures show. New statistics released 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.

Norfolk's waste to create energy in Suffolk

The landmark deal between Norfolk and Suffolk has been honoured. The agreement between our two counties will see 40,000 tonnes of Norfolk's residual household waste, delivered to 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.

Success for first-ever Suffolk Skills Show

Suffolk businesses turned out in great numbers to support the first-ever Suffolk Skills Show; a skills and careers event reaching over 4,000 young people which set out to engage with Suffolk's young people and provide an insight into the career opportunities available to them locally. The show targeted those aged between 11 and 24. The businesses exhibiting at the event worked hard to ensure those attending left with their eyes opened to the wide range of careers across Suffolk, some which they may never have considered. There were many interactive indoor and outdoor stands showcasing opportunities in energy, IT and technology, finance and business services, creative digital, agriculture, construction, motor vehicle, advanced manufacturing, ports and logistics as well as HM Forces.

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

A newly-awarded government grant 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 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 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.

Suffolk Record Office adds over 307,800 records to online catalogue

Staff and volunteers of Suffolk Record Office have now added over 307,800 records to the Suffolk Heritage Direct online catalogue. The digitalisation of Suffolk's historic records has had a successful start since SCC consulted with the public around improving the accessibility of Suffolk Record Office services. It was agreed that SCC would create digital images, upgrade the electronic catalogues and improve the service at the weekend, thus enabling more people to make use of and enjoy Suffolk's heritage. From 1st October 2014, all three record offices will close to the public on a Wednesday to allow staff to focus on digitalising records and electronic cataloguing. This work will vastly improve customer access to archives, and will contribute to a new, online experience when the new Suffolk Record Office website is launched late 2015.

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