



# December 2022 Town and Parish Newsletter

**Cllr. Lance Stanbury**  
**Mildenhall Division**

Build Back **Better**  
Build Back **Stronger**  
Build Back **Greener**

Dear Parish and Town Councillors,

I take pleasure in forwarding to you this monthly digest for my work in the Mildenhall Division and from the Administration at Suffolk County Council. My Mildenhall Division covers Mildenhall Town, and the parishes of Barton Mills, Freckenham and Worlington). My District Council Ward is The Rows.

The key issues with which I have been involved recently includes the Sunnica solar farm planning application;

- **Sunnica:** In December I attended the planning inspectorate hearings in Newmarket along with Cllr Brian Harvey and Matt Hancock MP regarding Sunnica's application to cover local arable land with solar panels; an area the size of at least 2,000 football pitches. I expressed grave concern about the risks of fire and explosion from the massive Lithion-Ion batteries which could release poisonous and inflammable gases. I asked the Inspectorate to weigh these risks highly, and as such refuse this application.



**Constituent Issues:** In addition to meetings in person and on Teams at Council, I continue to deal with local constituent issues and this month they have related to school transport, adult social care, school parking, footpaths, highways issues, and requests for locality

Best regards,

Cllr. Lance Stanbury

**County Councillor** for Mildenhall Division (includes Mildenhall, Barton Mills, Freckenham & Worlington).

**District Councillor** for The Rows (Beck Row, Holywell Row, Isleham Marian, Kenny Hill, The Rows)

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## **Funding for streetlighting in the former Forest Heath area.**

I understand that in recent weeks that some parish councils may have received communication from District Cllr. Andy Neal, regarding the situation pertaining to local streetlighting, in which it is suggested that residents in the former Forest Heath area are unfairly paying for streetlighting when residents elsewhere in the district are not. I am concerned that the picture being conveying is only half the story and so for completeness I wanted to appraise you of the whole picture so that you may assess the situation dispassionately based on all the facts.


When the two councils (Forest Heath and St. Edmundsbury) joined to form the new West Suffolk Council (WSC) it left several historical two-way anomalies between the two former authority areas that still needs reconciling, and which will be part of a wider review by Cabinet next year.

The proposed review will not only look at streetlighting and other similar issues but, more positively, at the future role and relationship the new West Suffolk Council should have with all parish and town councils. As well as trying to find a more consistent approach to who should be paying for what in an area, the review will mean looking at where best powers or service delivery may lay, and defining some guiding principles for that. WSC knows there are some parish and town councils who already wish to deliver more services in their areas, such as markets. And others who might welcome the opportunity to take on more. But also, WSC fully realises that there is not going to be a one-size fits all approach as each place has its own unique circumstances.

This piece of transformation work was always envisaged as part of the move to a single Council, and it will be led at director and portfolio holder level, before reporting back to councillors. But for obvious reasons there has been concentration and priorities on supporting businesses and communities through the pandemic since early 2020. Happily, the council now feels more confident that they will be able to do it justice and we will produce a timeline and plan that will be shared with West Suffolk councillors and town and parish councils next year – there's a little matter of an election before then.

To turn back to the issue of streetlights, this is of course due to historic decisions made in the past by various parties including town and parish councils and where responsibility varied across the whole of what is now West Suffolk. The majority of lighting in the District is actually the responsibility of the County Council, especially where linked to the highway. However, historically, parish, town and district councils sometimes added their own lights and/or took on responsibility. The range of organisations involved in this debate therefore includes town and parish councils, district councils, housing providers and the County Council and I am sure you will appreciate how complicated this will be to unpick – especially if decisions were made decades ago. This is also not just an issue confined to West Suffolk.

For your information, WSC currently pays around £65,000 a year for the lights within some parish and towns in the former St Edmundsbury area which are not linked to operational assets like car parks. There are also a small number of lights in the former Forest Heath area that WSC does still actually own and pay for. Part of the anomaly is that, in 2015, St Edmundsbury Borough Council wanted to transfer half the lighting that it then paid for, to Suffolk County Council, but to achieve this it had first to invest around £1.7 million of taxpayers' money in upgrades before Suffolk County Council would accept responsibility. As



an additional complication, when St Edmundsbury was formed in 1974, the large towns of Bury St Edmunds and Haverhill were not parishes, and town councils were only created later on in its existence. In contrast, Forest Heath did not transfer any streetlighting to the County Council before 2019, presumably because it chose not to burden the taxpayer then with the cost of upgrading the lights in its ownership, but mostly because the responsibility for the majority of lights in Forest Heath already sat with the parish and town councils. So the legacy issue goes back many decades and this is the situation that WSC has inherited.

Clearly all this may need unpicking, but in doing so WSC will have to review other anomalies, which could easily counterbalance the cost of the streetlighting. For example, in a reverse situation to streetlights, there are other service areas where all West Suffolk residents are now paying for things delivered in the former Forest Heath but not the former St Edmundsbury. Path liabilities is a typical case (estimated to be between £0.5m and £1m) that were not part of housing stock transfer by the former Forest Heath area and are now owned and are the responsibility of West Suffolk. Whereas, in contrast, these paths were in the main transferred to the Housing Association in the former St Edmundsbury area. So West Suffolk residents as a whole (including the former St Edmundsbury area) are presently paying for the maintenance of paths across the former Forest Heath area. So, based on fairness, if the cost of streetlighting in the north of the district were to be spread across the whole district, then one might argue so should other costs in the other direction.

These differences were inevitable when WSC was formed, and I hope that the review next year will show how the costs might be balanced out. But the point is, at this stage, that the funding of streetlighting should clearly not be looked at as an isolated injustice and with all things considered, we may find that in the end it's swings-and-roundabouts. But let's wait and see what the wider review finds.

In conclusion, I hope you will see that by taking this approach WSC will not only look at this one situation but also at a wider range of issues and opportunities to bring benefits to all.

Should your councillors wish to discuss any of this through, I will be delighted to pick this up.

### **Solar farm proposal “not anywhere near acceptable”**

Councillor Richard Rout, the council's deputy leader, told the Planning Inspectorate's Examination Authority panel that it is “the poorest application I have dealt with to date.”

Councillor Rout made these comments at the first hearing of the formal Examination process (Tuesday 6 December 2022) which hears representations from all interested parties of the proposal.

This process concludes on 28 March 2023, during which time more sessions will be held when the council will address its concerns in greater detail.

The council has many issues with the current application, including:

- The geographic scale of the proposal which will permanently transform the landscape
- The impact on local communities of the 24 month construction period
- Sunnica's serious shortcomings in terms of both evidence and methodology

- Sunnica’s presentation of proposal which makes it, and impacts on local communities, unclear
- Mitigation proposals do not appear to be tailored to the local context

**Councillor Richard Rout, Suffolk County Council’s Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Environment, said:**

“This is the poorest application I have dealt with in over four years of having held political responsibility for overseeing the council’s response to Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects, such as Sizewell C, EA2 North and EA1 windfarms, major interconnector projects and the East Anglia Green pylon runs.

“The council wholly supports the need for the nation’s low carbon future, and as an authority we have our own Net Zero by 2030 ambitions.

“But I will not allow Suffolk’s communities to be pushed to one side by an application like this, which has not adequately engaged with local people and businesses, nor seemingly done its homework on the enormous impacts this solar farm will have.

“We have seen some progress lately with the applicant, who has met with us to discuss some of the issues in more detail. But it’s deeply frustrating that this has only happened recently, it should have happened a long time ago whilst preparing for this current Examination.

“There remains a very great deal of work to be done before this proposal can be considered anywhere near acceptable.”

The Examining Authority began their process in September, which is will conclude on 28 March 2023. A report and recommendation will then be sent to Secretary of State, who is expected to make the final decision whether to approve the project or not, later in 2023.



## The Goal: let's unite to end violence against women and girls

### Column by Councillor Bobby Bennett, Suffolk County Council Cabinet Member for Equality and Communities.

Suffolk County Council is supporting the White Ribbon campaign. White Ribbon is the UK's leading charity engaging men and boys to end violence against women and girls, and this year's campaign, #TheGoal calls on people to make the White Ribbon Promise: never to use, excuse or remain silent about violence against women and girls.

This year, White Ribbon Day, 25th November, fell on the same week as the start of the FIFA men's World Cup. There has never been a better time for us to come together and start playing as a team to end violence against women and girls.

We are sadly all too aware that domestic abuse can increase during major football tournaments. Research by the University of Lancaster suggests that nationally, violent domestic abuse incidents increase by 38% when England loses football matches. Rates are also 26% higher when the team wins or draws. During the last World Cup in 2018, the NSPCC saw a 33% increase in contacts.


The White Ribbon campaign highlights 11 traits men and boys can nurture to help create a world of equality and safety for women: Ally, caring, empathetic, courageous, gentle, resilient, reliable, hopeful, principled, reflective, supportive. All men can join the team to end violence against women and girls. Whether you're a football fan or not, we can work together to achieve gender equality.

Last Friday I, alongside colleagues from the County Council, Suffolk Police, District and Borough Councils, Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner and Domestic Abuse services and organisations, signed the White Ribbon pledge, to say 'no' to violence against women and girls.

Wearing a White Ribbon is a powerful visual way to share this message and this can help to start important conversations with others. This is why I choose to wear mine.

There is lots of work happening locally to make Suffolk a safer place for women and girls. Earlier this year we updated Suffolk's Violence Against Women and Girls strategy, which was accompanied by an action plan as well as £357,000 funding for projects aiming to stop violence and support victims. We have now allocated almost £300,000 of this funding to six three-year projects. Further projects will be supported in round 2, successful projects will be announced early next year.

I also attended the Suffolk Police awards last week, where I presented The Sue Poole Award for supporting victims of domestic abuse. The Award recognises individuals or organisational innovation, achievement and commitment, in developing and maintaining projects, initiatives and solutions for victims and survivors of violence and abuse.



The Award is sponsored by the family of the late Sue Poole along with Suffolk County Council and is awarded in Sue's memory. Sue Poole worked tirelessly to support adults, young people and children affected by the impact of domestic abuse.

The winner of this year's award is Teri Cudby, who has been training Domestic Abuse Champions on behalf of Suffolk County Council since 2019.

Teri has now trained over 1050 champions across Suffolk and these champions are 'go to' people in organisations, businesses and communities who are trained to spot the signs of domestic abuse, give appropriate safety advice and signpost to support agencies following a disclosure of domestic abuse.

This training is free to anyone who lives or works in Suffolk. If you would like to book on to the training, or to find out more, please visit [Eventbrite.com](https://www.eventbrite.com) and search 'Suffolk Domestic Abuse Champions Network' or email [dachampions@suffolk.gov.uk](mailto:dachampions@suffolk.gov.uk)


In June 2021 Suffolk Libraries launched themselves as "Safe Spaces" for victim-survivors of domestic abuse. The idea of Safe Spaces is to provide an accessible safe and discrete environment where anyone, whether they are experiencing domestic abuse themselves, or if they're worried about someone else, can speak to someone in the library in confidence and be referred to the organisations who can support them. A visit to the library may offer someone the chance to get away from their abuser and so provides an ideal opportunity to speak to someone in confidence.

Suffolk Libraries are one of a number of organisations who have signed up to the national UK SAYS NO MORE Safe Spaces initiative, visit [Safe Space Locations | UK says no more](#) for more information and to find out how your organisation can get involved.

Lastly, if you are experiencing abuse, or are worried about a relative, friend or colleague, please call the Anglia Care Trust 24 Hour helpline for support on 0800 9775690 or visit the [Suffolk Domestic Abuse Helpline](#).

White Ribbon Day (25 November) began 16 days of action to highlight support available for women and girls, both nationally and locally. You can get involved by following Suffolk County Council on Facebook and Twitter and using the hashtag #TheGoalSuffolk.

Together, we can stop violence against women and girls.



## Keeping people in Suffolk warm this winter

“Suffolk Winter Warmth” provides items such as hats, gloves, scarves, blankets, duvets, baby sleep bags, hot water bottles, LED bulbs, draughtproofing and more, to households in need.

Following a successful pilot in November, Suffolk Winter Warmth launched this week. The project provides support for any household experiencing hardship and in need of support to prevent ill health and keep warm. Residents can be referred by professional or voluntary sector organisations supporting residents who are struggling to heat their homes. These organisations include: District and Borough Councils, Health Professionals, Citizens Advice and Community Groups, Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service, Rural Coffee Caravan and more.

The project is backed by £50,000 of funding from Suffolk’s Collaborative Communities Board and is co-ordinated on behalf of the whole county by East Suffolk Council.

Professional and voluntary organisations can refer residents to the scheme by visiting: [Winter warmth referral » East Suffolk Council](#).

Cllr Bobby Bennett, Suffolk County Council cabinet member for Equality and Communities, said: “With the weather turning colder and heating bills rising, we know that many may need additional support to heat their homes this winter.

“Suffolk Winter Warmth will provide vital support to families in need of a little extra help to keep warm and avoid ill health. If you are struggling, please reach out. Information can be found on your local Council website.”

There are also more than 250 voluntary warm spaces across Suffolk, where residents can meet up with members of the community in a warm, safe space, at no charge. A map of warm spaces in Suffolk can be found on the Rural Coffee Caravan website: <https://ruralcoffeecaravan.org.uk/map/>

Alongside this, all Suffolk Libraries will act as warm, safe spaces this winter. Information and opening times for Suffolk Libraries can be found at <https://www.suffolklibraries.co.uk/>

If your community would like to set up its own Warm Space to support local residents this winter, guidance is available from Rural Coffee Caravan and Community Action Suffolk at: <https://ruralcoffeecaravan.org.uk/winter-warmth/#warmspaces>

Further details of cost of living support available for Suffolk residents and organisations can be found at [www.suffolk.gov.uk/costofliving](http://www.suffolk.gov.uk/costofliving)



## Historic half a billion-pound devolution deal hands Suffolk regeneration and skills powers to level up.

Suffolk will be devolved power over their Adult Education budget, so they can shape provision in a way that best suits the needs of the local community and will receive immediate support to build new affordable homes on brownfield sites, as well as more capital funding to improve energy efficiency in houses.

The deal will also see Suffolk County Council handed control over a £480 million investment fund – this will be guaranteed for the next thirty years. This will enable the county to drive growth and plan for the long-term with certainty as it looks to level up and unlock its full economic potential.

Suffolk will also get a directly elected leader of the council. This not only provides a single person who is accountable to the people of Suffolk but gives the county a local champion who can attract investment and be a stronger voice in discussions with central government.


The Levelling Up Secretary will today attend a ceremony in Bury St Edmunds with Cllr Matthew Hicks to officially sign the deal. Michael Gove will also visit Norfolk to sign a devolution agreement with Norfolk County Council, which will transfer further money and power out of Whitehall. The deals follow Cornwall Council who just last week signed their own devolution deal with the government, unlocking powers and long-term funding of £360 million.

With three new devolution deals signed in the last seven days, 50% of England will now be covered by a devolution deal and reaffirms the government's commitment in the Levelling Up White Paper to offer a devolution deal to any area that wants one by 2030.

The deal also sets out the government's plans to devolve more power to Suffolk County Council through:

- **Investment:** It will bring decades of funding worth £480 million to improve the lives of Suffolk's residents and spend on their local priorities.
- **Housing:** The deal will provide £5.8 million to regenerate brownfield land into beautiful, affordable homes and drive economic growth across the area; Suffolk will also receive greater compulsory purchase powers.
- **Education:** The agreement devolves the Adult Education Budget so they can shape provision in a way that best suits the needs of residents and the local Suffolk economy.
- **Transport:** An integrated transport settlement starting in 2024/25, to support the area to improve key transport infrastructure priorities.
- **The Environment:** The new deal will help Suffolk deliver on its ambitions to be the country's greenest county with £3 million to improve energy efficiency in homes.

**Levelling Up Secretary Michael Gove, said:**



“I said we would give devolution deals to all that wanted them and today we are keeping that promise by putting power into the hands of the people who know best what Suffolk needs so they can level up the county and unleash its full economic potential.

“It is now people in places like Ipswich, Felixstowe and Newmarket who will have a greater say on how their areas are run. Because we know important decisions are best taken by those who know their areas inside out, not by those many miles away in Whitehall.

“This new deal will empower leaders in Suffolk to shape policies and direct spending to address issues that are unique to them, and I will commit to working with them even further to help drive through that change.”

**Cllr Matthew Hicks, Leader of Suffolk County Council, said:**

“This devolution deal is the first of its kind between the Government and a county council, making it a truly historic moment for Suffolk. The deal recognises Suffolk’s ambitions, would put more powers in the hands of local people and bring more than half a billion pounds of investment into the county.

“On the table are greater decision-making powers around transport, infrastructure, skills and more resources to help us achieve our net zero ambitions. Ultimately, this significant additional investment will improve the lives and outcomes of Suffolk’s residents.

“Devolution is a journey, not a one-off event. This deal for Suffolk is the first step towards an exciting future for our great county.”



## Why plans for devolution are a big deal for Suffolk

In August last year, the Government invited county councils across the country to step forward if they were ambitious enough to see a future where more decisions about important local priorities were made, not in Whitehall, but by local people who know what is needed.

Here in Suffolk, we answered that call. With the backing of the administration and the conservative group here at Suffolk County Council, and partners across Suffolk – including district and borough councils, our MPs, the Police and Crime Commissioner, and health, education and business leaders – we raised our hand and, through a determined and attractive proposal, invited the Government to turn its attention to our great county. Many other areas came forward alongside us. Few were successful.

We were delighted when the Government heard our calls and named Suffolk as one of only nine areas in the country where they were interested in actively negotiating a county devolution deal. I was proud that our ambition was realised and respected by Government officials and Ministers.

There followed months of negotiations and meetings where we made the case for Suffolk to get the deal it deserves. We fought for the greatest possible devolution of the Government's immense spending powers and for control of policy areas on which we could deliver significant improvements for our residents.

Importantly, we fought for all this without the need for additional bureaucracy that would cost money we do not have to spare and most certainly is not needed to turn our ambitions into reality.


Leader Matthew Hicks with Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities  
Minister Lee Rowley MP


Like all negotiations, there has been plenty of back and forth to secure the very best deal we could. With local backing, we stuck to our principles of maximising benefit but in a way that works for us. We are in this to deliver more investment in Suffolk and see greater decision-making powers in Suffolk.

If I could now fast forward to Thursday 17 November and the Chancellor of the Exchequer's Autumn Statement where I feel some misunderstanding needs ironing out.

The Government had informed us that the Chancellor would announce - among the many measures designed to steady the UK economy - that a devolution deal had been reached with Suffolk. This was a world stage on which Suffolk was a key player. A county of ambitious change.

I am frustrated that the inaccurate words used overshadowed our huge achievement. As I watched the statement, the Chancellor proudly announced that Suffolk is to get a directly-elected "Mayor".





For a moment I was dumbstruck. This was not what we had agreed. Nor would I personally ever agree to an additional needless and costly layer of bureaucracy. If that was the deal being offered to Suffolk, I would be the first to reject it.

Suffolk's devolution deal requires no such additional layer of bureaucracy, nor the public-funding associated with it. There would be no separate Mayoral authority, offices, staffing or taxing powers.

That is because we are seeking to have powers and funding devolved to Suffolk County Council – under the control of a directly-elected leader and cabinet – scrutinised by councillors and ultimately accountable to the people of Suffolk. It is exactly the model we have now but with one change – whoever has the privilege of being the leader would be directly elected by the people of Suffolk.

In fairness to Jeremy Hunt, this is a devolution deal with similarities to the Government's existing Mayor-making agenda, but in reality it is hugely different. It's devolution 2.0!

Leaders in Suffolk gathered for signing of the historic county deal at Claas UK headquarters in Little Saxham

This historic deal we are pursuing will be the first of its kind in the country. No previous deals have been like it, but I'm sure many will follow. If agreed, this would deliver decades of significant additional investment into local priorities that will improve the lives and outcomes of Suffolk's residents. It also places Suffolk front and centre for Government.

It will secure greater decision-making powers around transport, infrastructure and skills and give us the powers we need to help us achieve our net zero ambitions and create the Greenest County.

Devolution is a journey, not a one-off event. This deal for Suffolk is the first step in a process of further devolution and more deals - enabling us to deepen our self-determination arrangements over time and influence Government policy.


I accept that the full details of the deal are not yet in the public domain, and that therefore it is difficult to weigh up the benefits of what is on the table for us to take for Suffolk.

We have now agreed with Government that this position should change later this week and I look forward to sharing this important information with residents.

This is a 'minded to' decision and will be followed by a full public consultation where everyone will get their say.

I'd like to thank officers and partners across our districts, in particular, who have used their knowledge and expertise to secure for Suffolk this huge local opportunity to determine our future.

This is too big an opportunity to walk away. We must stay at the table and let Suffolk residents have their say on what is a once in several generations opportunity to secure over half a billion pounds of new investment in this great county.



## Warning after children seen playing on frozen pond

The advice comes after a tragic incident on Sunday, 11 December, in which four young boys died after falling into an icy lake at Babbs Mill Park near Solihull.

Since then, Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service has increased patrols at ponds, lakes, and reservoirs across the county to help highlight how dangerous icy water can be.

Despite recent safety messages from the service, firefighters have still seen children playing on a frozen pond at a park in Lowestoft, with members of the public reporting that they had also witnessed children testing the ice near the water's edge.

An inspection of the pond revealed that the ice is only a few centimetres thick and liable to break at any moment.

**Toby Gray, Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service Area Manager for Prevention and Protection said:**

“Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service was deeply saddened to hear of the incident in Solihull, and our thoughts remain with all those affected.

“We want to ensure that a similar tragedy doesn't happen in Suffolk, so our crews have been visiting parks and other public open spaces to help educate people on the lethal consequences of icy water and put posters up detailing safety advice.

“It is shocking that anyone is still playing on frozen water despite the dangers of doing so being well publicised recently. I would ask that parents speak to their children about staying away from iced-over water. You may think that your child has more sense, but it is easy to give into peer pressure without thinking about how deadly ice can be.”

Further advice on winter water safety, including what to do if you fall through the ice, is available at [www.rlss.org.uk/winter-water-safety](http://www.rlss.org.uk/winter-water-safety).

## Record number of residents help shape county council budget

Each year, councils everywhere engage with their residents about how much money they plan to spend on public services, in order to set their annual budget. Suffolk County Council is no different with a budget that funds services from gritting roads during the winter, to providing Family Hubs and keeping the most vulnerable people safe and well. The budget for Suffolk County Council services in 2022/23 is £625 million.

**Councillor Richard Rout, deputy leader and cabinet member with responsibility for finance, said:**

“Asking Suffolk’s residents to be involved in the process of setting our budget is a key part of shaping our priorities. After all, it is the residents who benefit from these services so it is only right they have input into how we divide up the limited funding.

“When we were deciding how to consult this year, we felt it essential to try and maximise the number of residents we engaged with, to hear their views and to build a budget that considers what they feel is important.


“Having explained the challenging position we are in, with greater demand on our limited funding pots alongside a rise in inflation and associated costs, and what goes into creating our budget each year, they told us what services were important to them, where they would spend more money, and where they would spend less.”

Between early October and the start of December, the county council collected a total of 2,617 responses. From this feedback which was made up of a wide range of individuals, it saw that social care for both adults and children were the two top areas where people feel the council should be spending more, with mental health services the next most important area. Just behind these areas, residents want more to be spent on the county’s roads and pavements and local bus services.

**Councillor Richard Rout, continued:**

“This has been an incredibly valuable exercise and I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who engaged with us. The scale of feedback, from a diverse range of individuals and groups, will help us to make better informed decisions that will benefit as many people as possible in Suffolk.”


Within the feedback the county has seen a majority support for an increase in council tax with 48.6% stating that council tax should increase, compared with 31.8% who oppose an increase. Similarly, when asked about the specific increase in funding for adult social care, 51.7% supported an increase compared with 18.9% opposing this increase. Due to the number of residents taking part in this survey, there was a good representative view from across Suffolk, recognising that a small increase in council tax could allow the county council to continue providing the right level of service to its residents.



Newly launched focus groups also helped form part of the county council's engagement with residents, community groups and other key local representatives. This gave the county council the opportunity to discuss the pressures it faces and understand the challenges that those in Suffolk's communities are facing.

A budget proposal is now being developed with many factors in mind, such as ensuring the right level of funding is available to deliver statutory services and political priorities but also giving due consideration to the feedback received from the budget survey.

The proposals will first be considered by Suffolk County Council's Scrutiny Committee in January 2023, before being debated, and voted upon, by all Suffolk County Councillors in February 2023.



## Suffolk County Council becomes a Disability Confident Leader

This achievement recognises the progress the council has made to make both its recruitment processes and working environment more inclusive for disabled people, and follows the council attaining Disability Confident Employer status in 2017.

Being a Disability Confident organisation means the council plays a leading role in changing attitudes, behaviour and cultures, both within the organisation, and wider, through its networks and communities. Becoming a Disability Confident Leader means that the County Council will also act as a champion in supporting other businesses in the area to become Disability Confident.

According to data from the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP), more than 4.7 million disabled people are in work, and yet disabled people are almost twice as likely to be unemployed as non-disabled people, and three times as likely to be economically inactive. The employment rate of disabled people is estimated to be 53%, compared to 82% of non-disabled people.

There are also many people in employment who don't share their disability with their employer or who aren't yet aware of it themselves. Over 80% of disabilities are invisible. In Suffolk County Council, 61% of staff have declared their status, the council aims to increase this number with the measures it has put in place in becoming a Disability Confident Leader.


**Nicola Beach, Chief Executive of Suffolk County Council, said:**

**“As an employer, we recognise the benefits for both our employees and for the organisation, of creating a supportive culture in which people feel comfortable to disclose their disability, and we try to build accessibility into everything we do. At Suffolk County Council we value diversity, and it is so important that our workforce reflects the communities we serve. “The Disability Confident scheme provides a best practice framework for employers to move towards improved disability inclusion.”**

Some of the council's actions to achieve Disability Confident Leader status have included:

- Offering disabled candidates the chance to take part in the Disability Confident Interview Scheme, where they are guaranteed an interview for a job they have applied for, if they meet the minimum criteria.
- Engaging with our local Job Centre, supporting jobs fairs for disabled job seekers.
- Having active staff networks focussed on disabilities, such as The disABILITY Network, The Mental Health Network, The D(d)eaf Network and The Neurodiversity Network.
- Offering reasonable adjustments during both the recruitment process and employment to support disabled people.
- Making disability inclusion training part of our mandatory training for all staff.
- Considering Disability Confident status when reviewing the social value of contracts we commission.
- Offering priority consideration for vacancies to internal disabled staff.



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- Making adjustments to our buildings to ensure they are accessible to disabled people.
  - Having guidance about accessible communications, which is the expected default for all of our communications

**Nicola Beach added:**

**“Looking forward, our Disability Strategy, alongside feedback from our Disability Confident Leader validators, the Business Disability Forum, will help us to continue to improve the experiences for disabled people within our organisation and in our community.”**

**Councillor Bobby Bennett, Cabinet Member for Equality and Communities, said:**  
**We are proud to act as a role model for disability inclusion. We welcome and support disabled people at Suffolk County Council, and we encourage other organisations to join the Disability Confident Scheme by visiting [disabilityconfident.campaign.gov.uk](https://disabilityconfident.campaign.gov.uk)**



## Council to protect frontline services and increase funding in budget proposal

Adult care services and children's services will receive £47m more funding as part of Suffolk County Council's £685m budget proposals, published today.

Despite an incredibly challenging economic climate, the council has been able to produce a balanced budget. This will protect the services that people rely on the most and continue to care for the most vulnerable, which accounts for 75% of the whole budget.

Adult care services will have £34m more in their budget, and children's services will have a further £13m. This will help with the extra expense needed to meet the huge increase in demands for services, as well as higher costs due to inflation.

The budget-setting has been achieved with input from the council's partners, officers, departments and notably, Suffolk residents. Over 2,600 local people contributed to an online survey and focus groups, asking where they would spend more money, spend less money, and their views on Council Tax.

The top service areas where people wanted to spend more, were social care services for adults and children.

**Adult and children's care were at the heart of our budget setting last year, and are again this year. This is exactly what people told us in our public survey too, so we are all in agreement about investing more in these areas, and it meets one of our four ambitions for Suffolk - to look after people's health and wellbeing.**

**This year, it's a case of being prudent across all areas of the organisation. Even though we have created £15.5m of savings, our frontline services are protected and receiving more funding.**

**Alongside an increase in our funding from Government, and a history of excellent financial management at the council, I'm proud that we've been able to navigate our way through the extremely turbulent, economic waters caused by the Covid-19 pandemic and Vladimir Putin's illegal war in Ukraine. We will be able to ensure that the services which mean the most to people, are still provided.**

### **Councillor Richard Rout, Suffolk County Council's Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Environment**

Some of the service areas where people also said they wanted to see more money spent, will receive additional funding:

- £700,000 for SEND services to support new recruitment, which is on top of the £1.1m invested this year
- £500,000 for Highways: to use environmentally friendly weed treatments, and stop using glyphosate which can damage wildlife
- £110,000 for tree management: to support the 'right tree right place' policy, having an appropriate inspection regime and supporting the resulting tree management requirements.

- £45,000 for Citizens Advice: to support work during cost of living challenges

A budget gap for next year - the difference between what money is available and what needs to be spent - had already been identified, resulting in savings of £15.5m for next year.

Under the proposals, the council's budget would increase by 9.6% (from £625.3m to £685.3). Additional funds would come from a total 3.99% increase in Council Tax, and an increase in funds from the Government for adult and children's social care.

Regarding Council Tax, the proposed 3.99% increase would be made up of a 1.99% increase in general Council Tax and a 2.00% increase dedicated to funding adult care.

This means costs for a household would look like:

- Band B property: £22.32 per week (85 pence per week increase from 2022-23)  
(Band B properties are the most common in Suffolk)
- Band D property: £28.70 per week (£1.10 pence per week increase from 2022-23)

**I'm grateful to all those who completed our survey and could understand the difficult position that the council is in, with more demands on our services than ever before, and increasing costs due to inflation.**

**Our survey results tell me that people appreciate the need to increase Council Tax – 49% of people supported an increase, compared with 32% who didn't.**

**We want to strike the fairest balance possible. We have produced a budget proposal which means we don't have to take as much Council Tax from people, as Government allows us to. This means a Band B property, the most common in Suffolk, will see an increase of 85p per week.**

**Just like at the council, I understand that every penny counts in homes around the county.**

**Councillor Richard Rout, Suffolk County Council's Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Environment**

The proposed budget will be discussed at the council's Scrutiny meeting on 10 January 2023, then presented at the Cabinet meeting on 24 January, with the final budget debated and voted on at Full Council on 9 February.

The Scrutiny meeting will be available to stream on [Suffolk County Council's YouTube channel](#), and public questions can be submitted in advance, details available at [www.suffolk.gov.uk](http://www.suffolk.gov.uk)

Read [papers for the SCC Scrutiny meeting on 10 January 2023 here](#).