

SUFFOLK COUNTY COUNCILLOR'S REPORT – OCTOBER 2023



Cllr Stephen Burroughes - Framlingham Division

- **NEW INDEPENDENT FIRE CONTROL CENTRE GIVES BEST DEAL FOR SUFFOLK**

A new fire control centre fitted with state-of-the-art communications for mobilising and managing Suffolk's firefighters would be in the best interests of the county, a report to councillors says. Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) announced in June it would be withdrawing from the shared control room arrangement in place since 2011 with Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Fire and Rescue Service, based in Huntingdon.

The report recommended approval to Suffolk County Council's Cabinet in September that fire control would now be brought back into the county by the end of 2024.

The report says the move is necessary because a project to replace the current mobilising technology agreed by both services in 2019, is currently two years overdue. In addition, the French company providing the new technology entered "Redressment Judiciaire" a form of financial administration which resulted in the freezing of its assets and liabilities. If the company comes out of administration, it will remain with its liabilities to pay.

SFRS concluded the non-delivery and missed milestones by the new technology provider, together with its financial predicament, means continuing with the current IT mobilising project presents an unacceptable risk to firefighters and the public.

This risk should be mitigated as soon as possible by Suffolk having its own control room using tried and tested systems. However, the current system continues to mobilise the emergency response effectively, keeping Suffolk safe. An initial capital investment of £1.588m would be required for project delivery over three years. Additional revenue service of £1.615m annually will need to be provided to support the operating cost of the control room.

- **PUBLIC VIEWS SOUGHT OVER IMPROVEMENTS TO A140**

Suffolk County Council has identified three junctions on the A140 – the Thornham Magna junction, the A1120 Earl Stonham junction, and the A140/B1078 junction, which also connects to the A14 – as pinch-point areas that may benefit from improvement. The assessments show that these junctions are likely to suffer from increasing traffic congestion and associated road safety problems in the future. Analysis has also shown that they lack sufficient infrastructure for active travel and passenger transport.

With these concerns in mind, the county council is seeking the public's feedback to inform future bids for funding from the Department of Transport to improve the junctions.

A public survey has been launched and closes on Sunday 15 October. More information can be found at www.suffolk.gov.uk/a140

Take part in the survey: www.smartsurvey.co.uk/s/A140MRNsurvey

- **AWARDS FOR CARE WORKERS WHO SAVED CENTENARIAN FROM INTERNATIONAL SCAM**

A Suffolk care worker and her boss who saved a 101-year-old woman from an international scam that saw her fleeced of nearly £50,000 are being formally recognised. Sally Mills and Paul Watts are to receive Certificates of Merit from Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service for stepping in when they realised the vulnerable woman was being targeted by heartless hoaxers in Austria. They were conning the woman through a clairvoyant scam, where people pose as spiritual guides offering insights into a person's life and the future.

They typically target the elderly and lonely via mass mailshot letters, often using an image of someone who looks trustworthy to pose as a clairvoyant.

In this case it was British actress and model Carol-Anne Goodman, who had no idea her image was being used, and who is backing the Trading Standards campaign to crackdown on the scammers.

Sally is a community support worker for Caring Moments Ltd, a domiciliary care provider based in Lowestoft which cares for 60 users around the Waveney valley area. She was assigned to care for the woman and became suspicious when on one visit the victim handed her some post to send and when she returned to her car £45 in cash fell out from a pre-paid envelope.

Paul had attended training given by Suffolk Trading Standards officer Lesley Crompton and recognised the victim was sending money to clairvoyant scammers.

Lesley worked with the team at Caring Moments to put support and prevention in place to prevent the victim sending any further money, and they have helped provide statements for an international investigation. It is estimated that the victim has sent over £48,000 over several years.

The victim, who has since celebrated her 103rd birthday, now has means to sort her mail, and every letter that she thinks might be a scam is placed in a box for the care team to check when they visit.

Sally has since appeared on ITV's This Morning show to help highlight the ongoing investigation into clairvoyant scams that is being coordinated by the National Trading Standards Scam Team.

In August, Suffolk Trading Standards presented Sally and Paul with flowers and 'Suffolk Says Thanks' badges for their intervention.

The teams also nominated them for a Certificate of Merit at the Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service Awards, which they collected at a ceremony in September. Suffolk Trading Standards encourages people to join the fight against scammers by signing up to become a Trading Standards Champion.

For more details go to the Trading Standards website at www.suffolk.gov.uk/JoinTheFight

• **INFLATION, SEND SCHOOL TRANSPORT AND CARE COSTS ADD TO PREDICTED OVERSPEND**

Inflation, school transport for children with SEND, and looking after children in care are the main factors for SCC forecasting to spend £22.3m over its £688.1m budget for this year. This is a similar story for many councils across the country, due to higher demand for their services, inflation remaining higher than expected for longer, and interest rates rising to levels not forecast by financial markets.

[Recent research by the County Councils Network](#) suggests that England's largest councils will need to make at least £1bn in savings to balance their current 2023/24 budgets.

A [BBC investigation](#) also reported that councils expect to be £5.2bn short of balancing budgets by April 2026, the average council facing a £33m predicted deficit by 2025-26.

Suffolk County Council projects a 4% overspend (£29.3m), to be partially offset by an additional Section 31 grant from Government, and additional income from the pooling of business rates with the district and borough councils in Suffolk, totalling £7m.

Details of the main areas of overspend are:

- **School transport** - forecast to overspend by £11.4m (39% of the overspend), with £8.3m of this being travel costs for children with special education needs and disabilities (SEND). This is largely due to more children with SEND needs, transport operators being in limited supply, and rising costs from those operators who are also feeling the impacts of inflation, especially fuel costs.
- **Children in care** - forecast to overspend by £8.2m (28% of the overspend). The council has a responsibility to provide care for children and young people under the age of 18. Some of these have

incredibly complex needs requiring 24-hour care from multiple carers. There is currently an unexpectedly higher number of children requiring this support, with this costing an average of £22,700 per week, per child.

- **Adult care services** - forecast to overspend by £3.5m (12% of the overspend) for purchasing care, due to increases in demand, and staffing costs in the sector. The fees paid for residential and nursing placements remain high with 64% of new residential and nursing packages being above the published rate of £806 per week, with some specialist packages being over £1,500 per week.
- **Inflation** - inflation and interest rates have been higher than experienced in a generation, with the legacy of COVID-19 continuing to have a significant impact on various services. As an example, there is an estimated £3.0m (10% of the overspend) pressure as pay settlements continue to be above historical norms as inflation has remained stubbornly high during 2023 so far. High interest rates mean it has been more costly than anticipated to borrow money, which the council does to help fund big projects, such as upgrading highways, maintaining schools or developing household recycling centres.

In addition to the net overspend of £22.3m from this main budget, the council is forecasting an overspend of £15.8m against its £256.5m budget from the Dedicated Schools Grant and Pupil Premium Grant. This is money from Government specifically to fund schools and services for pupils. This overspend comes solely from resources spent on Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) provision, not including school transport. Suffolk, like many other local authorities, is seeing a continuous increase in demand which is not being met by the same level of increase in funding.

Despite these challenges, council departments continue to make savings. This year's budget identified £25.1m of savings to be made, and the latest figures show that £20m of this is projected to be achieved.

• **COUNCILS UNITE AGAINST NATIONAL GRID PYLON PROPOSALS**

In a [joint letter to National Grid](#), the leaders of the three councils address the extensive impact on landscapes and local communities that the scheme would bring. They also highlight that an offshore solution has not been sufficiently investigated, and the opportunities that this could bring to co-ordinate with other large-scale energy projects off the region's coast.

The Norwich to Tilbury project would see 114 miles of electricity pylons weave their way through the three counties. Only a small percentage of this cabling would go underground, an issue which the councils also raise, stating that more would be needed particularly in the Dedham Vale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and near Diss and the Waveney Valley.

Councillor Kevin Bentley, Leader of Essex County Council, said:

We have taken to writing at this time, as there is still the opportunity to explore all options and solutions for a development of this scale. We all support the collective effort to tackle climate change, work towards net zero and to create a secure future for the country's energy. But there are so many elements of this proposal which just do not go far enough.

Councillor Kay Mason Billig, Leader of Norfolk County Council, said:

The impact that this scheme would have should not be underestimated, particularly on the region's unique, designated landscapes and the many communities that will be affected. We all agree that studies into an offshore solution have not been appropriately explored, this is a viable option which we feel has been dismissed too readily.

Councillor Matthew Hicks, Leader of Suffolk County Council, said:

Should proposals for the project progress, and further consultations take place, we would expect National Grid to invest a lot more time and effort in working with our local communities. These large schemes can be guilty of doing the minimum necessary when they should be working with local people and businesses as much as possible, who know the area and can help find the best solutions, should the project go ahead.

National Grid held a second, non-statutory consultation, which closed on 21 August 2023. It is expected that a statutory consultation will take place in 2024.

- **POWERFUL FOSTERING FILM 'ANY OF US' LAUNCHED**

Suffolk County Council is excited to announce the launch of "Any Of Us," a compelling fostering film that sends a universal message that anyone with the capacity to care can become a foster carer. The film spotlights three normal people demonstrating the caring qualities essential to becoming a foster carer. Their stories intertwine with Chloe's journey into fostering, creating the narrative that any of us can foster. Fostering with your council or children's trust means supporting your community by offering safe, nurturing homes to children in need.

The film has been produced by Reel TwentyFive and project managed by CAN Digital/Rachel Brown. This is the sixth film produced by a growing partnership of councils and children's trusts to promote local authority fostering. The national launch took place at Birmingham's Everyman cinema on 26 September. If you are interested in becoming a foster carer request your free foster carer pack and find out about the training, support and allowances you'll receive:

[Visit the foster page](#)

Call us: 01473 264800

Email us: fosterandadopt@suffolk.gov.uk

- **VIEWS SOUGHT ON SUFFOLK WALKING, WHEELING AND CYCLING ROUTES**

Suffolk County Council has been awarded nearly £11.7 million to develop active travel schemes, including measures such as cycle lanes, shared-use paths, and improved crossing points on roads. It is hoped that the improvements would help more people to walk, wheel and cycle in their everyday lives and to enjoy safer streets, reduced congestion and better health and air quality.

The county council has identified eighteen different routes which could benefit from improvement, including:

- Nacton Road, Ipswich
- Woodbridge Road, Ipswich
- Princes Street, Ipswich
- Ipswich Hospital to Ipswich Waterfront
- Capel St Mary to Copdock Park and Ride
- Grange Road, Felixstowe
- East to West, Bury St Edmunds
- Various other routes located around Ipswich

Each of the schemes is at a different stage of development; if agreed to proceed following the consultation, some schemes will need additional funding as they move to the construction phase. Residents can read more about the different routes and have their say at <https://arcg.is/1yDG49>. The surveys close on 23 November 2023.

For further information from my report or questions please contact me at:

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