

County Council report – January 2023

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](#).

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

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.

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.

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.

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)

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

