

Parish Report July 2018

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Opposition successfully “call in” Suffolk County Council school transport cuts

On Tuesday 19 June, Suffolk County Council’s Cabinet voted to change the Home to School Transport policy so that only children travelling to their nearest school would receive free transport. The changes are due to be phased in from September 2019.

As you may be aware, I and my colleagues within the Liberal Democrat, Green and Independent Group have been opposed to this policy change since it was announced in September 2018. There has also been very vocal opposition from schools, parents and carers across Suffolk.

Following the Cabinet meeting, opposition councillors from all parties united to “call-in” the decision. We have received confirmation from the Monitoring Officer that the concerns presented within our call-in are valid.

This means the decision has been put on hold until 9 July, when the council’s Scrutiny Committee will investigate further. If they determine that the Cabinet did not have enough information to make an appropriate and informed decision, the matter will be referred back to Cabinet to reconsider at a later date.

The “call-in” was successful on three fronts:

1. There is concern at the quality and reliability of the financial modelling;
2. Whether the Cabinet were fully informed of the role of the Consultation Institute;
3. Whether there was enough analysis of the experience of Essex County Council, who implemented a similar policy in 2013.

Major review of Suffolk Highways announced

The new Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Highways, Cllr Mary Evans, has launched a major review of the way highways in Suffolk are maintained.

Areas due to be reviewed include:

- Existing policy which determines how resources are deployed, known as the Suffolk Highway Maintenance Operational Plan (HMOP);
- How the location of potholes on the road is considered alongside the width and depth, recognising the impact they can have on cyclists and motorcyclists;
- How utility companies coordinate roadworks and are held to account for their actions;
- How residents, councillors and businesses are informed about road repairs and how they can access information;

- Financial control and contract management;
- How town and parish councils can work closer with Suffolk Highways to make the best use of their local knowledge, skills, money and time.

Lake Lothing Third Crossing will require an additional £8m

Consent has been given by the Cabinet to finalise and submit development plans for the Lake Lothing Third Crossing to the Planning Inspectorate. There are high levels of public support for the project, with a recent public consultation showed that 96% agree there is a need for the bridge.

The latest budget predictions suggest a further £8 million may be needed to complete the project, due to the rising cost of land acquisitions. Suffolk County Council have stated that the project will be managed so as to contain this upward pressure on the budget as much as possible. However, the Cabinet have acknowledged the potential additional costs to give the Planning Inspectorate comfort that the bridge will be funded in all scenarios.

The further funding of £8m will be made available by the Cabinet if needed.

Consultation launched on future commissioning of specialist education services

Suffolk County Council have launched a consultation into the commissioning strategy for the development of Suffolk's specialist educational provision.

Demand for specialist education places in Suffolk for children with SEND continues to grow, and currently the county council has a much lower number of specialist education places than other similar authorities. This means that many children in Suffolk are forced to travel out of county to access the education provision they need – and often Suffolk County Council foots the bill.

At a time when the Council is attempting to reduce the amount of free home to school transport it provides over fears of escalating costs, it is vital that we begin to provide more SEND provision within Suffolk.

The 6 week consultation will look at three options for meeting the additional demand for specialist provision. More information and a link to the consultation can be found online at: <http://www.suffolk.gov.uk/SENDsufficiencyeducation>