

Parish Report - November 2019

Councillor

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Cabinet reshuffle at Suffolk County Council

On 15 October, there was a major reshuffle of the Suffolk County Council Cabinet. The key changes are:

- Cllr Gordon Jones is the new Cabinet Member for Finance
- Cllr Mary Evans remains as deputy leader and is the new Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education and Skills
- Cllr Andrew Reid is the new Cabinet Member for Highways, Transport and Rural Affairs
- Responsibility for the council's policy on Sizewell C moves to Cllr Richard Rout (Cabinet Member for Environment and Public Protection)
- Responsibility for the council's property portfolio and assets moves to Cllr Nick Gowrley (Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Housing and Enterprise)

35% cut to Health Visitors

Earlier this year, there were reports that Suffolk County Council planned to cut 25% of Health Visitors. We have now learned that the council has in fact reduced Health Visitors by 35%, without informing either the public or councillors. The staffing cuts were made as part of an internal restructure of the 0-19 Healthy Child Service in order to save £1m.

In England, it is mandatory for families to receive five visits to check on the health of children/parents during pregnancy early childhood, and the guidance states that these checks should be undertaken by health visitors. However, as a result of these staffing reductions, in Suffolk only three of these visits will be undertaken by specially trained health visitors, with staff nurses expected to take on the other two checks.

My group proposed a motion at Council on the 17 October, asking the administration to reconsider these cuts, which unfortunately was voted down.

Boundary review – extension of consultation

The Boundary Commission has extended the deadline for their consultation on new division boundaries for Suffolk County Council until 2 January 2020.

As part of this review, the Boundary Commission are proposing to reduce councillor numbers in Suffolk from 75 to 70.

You can find out more information and respond to the consultation here:

<https://consultation.lgbce.org.uk/node/18495>

Review of school transport policy confirmed

Cllr Mary Evans, Cabinet Member for Children’s Services, Education and Skills, has apologised to families affected by the new school transport policy and has confirmed that there will be a review of the policy. However, it is likely that this review will only focus on the implementation of the new policy, rather than the inherent problems with the policy itself.

Since the introduction of the new policy, there has been a large increase in the number of transport appeals: 141 appeals were submitted from 1 July – 18 October, compared to an average of just 21 for the same time period in previous years. Furthermore, over 70% of these appeals have been decided in favour of parents who had initially been refused transport by the council.

£7.5m investment in Great Blakenham Mixed Recycling Facility

The Cabinet has agreed to a capital investment of £7.5m in the Great Blakenham Mixed Recycling Facility, which will be funded through the Public Works Loans Board. The expected annual borrowing cost is £900,000.

Suffolk County Council is currently charged £79.61 per tonne of mixed recycling waste it brings to Great Blakenham, but the new investment would reduce that to £58.20 per tonne. This reduction in “gate fees” is expected to generate net savings of £6.6m over the life of the nine-year contract, which will be shared between Suffolk County Council and the other district/borough councils within the Suffolk Waste Partnership.