

Parish Report – January 2020

Councillor
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Please note: I will be away visiting my daughter in New Zealand from 27 December – 11 February but will still be contactable by email and in an emergency by my mobile (07889389443).

2020-21 Budget Proposals

Due to the General Election, the announcement of the 2020-21 budget proposals was delayed until end of December. These proposals will be scrutinised on Tuesday 7 January, before being discussed by the Cabinet on 24 January and by the full Council on 13 February.

Overview

- Forecast Budget Requirement = £545.4m
- Expected Funding = £550.8m
- The remaining funding will be divided into contributions to reserves (£1.8m), investment into Highways (£0.5m) and the “Suffolk 2020 Fund” (£3m)

Council Tax

Council Tax is due to increase by 4% in 2020-21. 2% of this will be for general council tax, whilst another 2% will be the final increase for the Social Care Precept.

Suffolk 2020 Fund

£3m of the Council’s funding will be available through the “Suffolk 2020 Fund”. The purpose of this fund is to enable investment in projects focused on carbon reduction/offset, road safety, natural environment, built environment, innovation and use of technology.

The budget proposals suggest that all projects will need to have a Cabinet “sponsor” and be capable of delivery within 12 months. They must have a clear return on investment (economic, social and/or environmental) and involve non-recurring expenditure.

More details on how this funding will be allocated, and who can bid for funding, is not yet known.

Citizens Advice

In last year's budget, Suffolk County Council announced that it would be removing the £368,000 grant for Citizens Advice. This cut was expected to be phased in, with half of the grant cut in 2019-20 and the rest cut in the 2020-21 budget.

However, the budget proposals for 2020-21 include £120,000 funding for Citizens Advice. This grant will remain in place for three years only and will be subject to annual review of the service in terms of efficiency, income generation and impact.

After three years of additional funding, the council expects Citizens Advice to become financially independent.

Savings

There are no major cuts to services proposed in the 2020-21 budget. However, the budget does rely on the council achieving £7.2m of savings from its transformation programmes, and a further £12.3m from "mitigations and savings".

Future bus projects

Suffolk County Council is planning to launch a pilot project in early 2020, using school buses to provide bus services for rural communities during off-peak hours. The scheme will run as a pre-book service via a series of villages from Stowmarket to Cockfield, before connecting with Sudbury services. The reverse journey will happen in the afternoon. If the pilot is successful, this system may be implemented in other parts of the county.

At a Scrutiny meeting in December, the deputy cabinet member for transport announced that the council was planning to bid for around £20 million from the Department for Transport for an electric bus pilot scheme. If the bid is successful, the council has said that it plans to launch the pilot scheme within 12-18 months in the Bury St Edmunds area.

First new SEND units announced

In January 2019, Suffolk County Council agreed to provide an additional £45.1m to fund additional school and specialist units for children with SEND.

The first 10 specialist units, providing 168 spaces, are due to open in September 2020. The new units will be based at:

- Pipers Vale Primary Academy, Ipswich (Key Stage 1)
- Burton End Primary Academy (KS1)
- Murrayfield Primary Academy, Ipswich (communication and interaction needs - KS2)
- Houldsworth Valley Primary Academy (communication and interaction needs - KS2)
- Causton Junior School (communication and interaction needs - KS2)
- Copleston High School, Ipswich (communication and interaction needs - KS3/4)
- Ixworth School (communication and interaction needs - KS3/4)
- Newmarket Academy (community and interaction needs - KS3/4)
- Clements Primary Academy, Haverhill (cognition and learning needs - KS2)
- Castle Manor Academy, Haverhill (cognition and learning needs - KS3/4)