

Parish Report - May 2019

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Funding approved for new SEND schools

On Tuesday 23 April the Cabinet approved a capital investment of £24.1m to develop new special education placements in Suffolk. This follows the recommendations of a cross-party Policy Development Panel earlier in the year to invest a total of £45.6m in order to develop 800 new SEND placements by 2025. Future phases of the investment will be agreed during the normal budget setting process in February of each subsequent financial year.

The £24.1m agreed by Cabinet will be used to fund the first two years of the investment programme (2019/20 and 2020/21), to ensure that new specialist units can open as soon as possible. It is expected that 308 new places will be created by schemes due to complete in September 2020, and a further 216 places will be created by schemes due to complete in September 2021.

The capital investment of £24.1m will be financed through borrowing, at a cost of £1.2m per annum.

Children's Centres Policy Development Panel

As you may be aware from media reports, my group (made up of Liberal Democrat, Green and Independent Councillors) made the decision to withdraw our representative from a Policy Development Panel that was looking into the future of family services in Suffolk.

Unfortunately, given the confidential nature of the PDP meetings, I am unable to disclose exactly what the panel had been discussing. However, as has already been reported in the media, it became clear to us that the sole focus of the panel was on reducing the number of children's centres in the county. As a group, we value the work of children's centres and will not be complicit in any attempts to reduce their numbers.

SEND Oversight Board

In my previous report, I informed you that a SEND Oversight Board would be established in response to Ofsted's ruling that Suffolk County Council's SEND services are "inadequate". The board is made up of councillors, officers, clinical commissioning group staff and voluntary organisations such as Suffolk Parent Carer Network.

The board met for the first time on Friday 26 April. However, despite our numerous requests to be involved, the administration have only invited one opposition representative from the Labour group. The Liberal Democrat, Green and Independent Group therefore doesn't have the opportunity to input into these meetings.

We understand that the Oversight Board will only be meeting four times a year, with the next meeting scheduled for September. Given the urgent need for improvements in the SEND service, I am concerned at how effective this board will be.