

Parish Report November 2017

Councillor

David Wood (Peninsula)

Triangle
Ipswich Road
Tattingstone, Ipswich
IP9 2NN

07545423831 / 07889389443
david.wood@suffolk.gov.uk

2018-19 budget proposals announced

Suffolk County Council have released their budget proposals and savings plan for 2018-19. These were presented to the Scrutiny Committee on 23 November.

Council Tax will be increased by 1.99%, following a seven-year freeze. This will be combined with a further 3% increase due to the Adult Social Care Precept, making a **total council tax increase of 4.99% for 2018-19**.

SCC are forecasting a budget gap of £26.85m, and are offsetting this with a **savings plan totalling £23.9m**. This means that a further £3m will need to be spent from the Council's reserves in 2018-19. The savings from each directorate are outlined below.

Adult and Community Services

Savings will come from the Adult Care budget, with a proposed £11m reduction in spending on care purchasing and a £1m saving achieved by cutting the Sheltered Housing Grant. To achieve the £11m reduction in care purchasing spend, ACS have said that they will be managing demand for local authority provided care, promoting better integration between health and care systems in the County, and changing the way that care is provided.

The Liberal Democrat, Green and Independent Group are particularly concerned by the loss of the Sheltered Housing Grant, which is used by sheltered housing providers to give low-level support to elderly residents, such as emergency alarm cords in their homes. Our representatives on the Scrutiny Committee queried whether this was a wise decision, and argued that this cut would reduce support for independent living and may increase demand for costly care in the future.

Health, Wellbeing and Children's Services

Health, Wellbeing and Children's Services are expected to make savings of £0.25m, in part through a systems transformation which will make better use of digital technology. During Scrutiny, we questioned whether this was a realistic budget for Children's Services in 2018-19, given that they are facing an overspend of £6.4m against their 2017-18 budget.

Fire and Public Safety

Both Trading Standards and Citizens Advice will see a reduction in funding in 2018-19, in order to save £0.17m. The Liberal Democrat, Green and Independent Group are concerned that this decision is short-sighted. Trading Standards and Citizens Advice provide vital support to both residents and businesses in Suffolk, and both are facing additional pressures. The Council acknowledged that the return on investment in these services is high, and that there is a risk that reducing funding could cause increased demand in other areas of the Council.

Resource Management

Savings of £0.25m are due to be made through cuts to subsidised transport services and savings from community transport services. Reviews are currently being undertaken to determine which bus services will be reduced. Although Suffolk County Council has pledged to work with local

Councillors, we are not convinced that Councillors and local people will be properly consulted over any changes.

Suffolk County Council's current financial position

Suffolk County Council is currently predicting a £10.2m overspend of its 2017-18 revenue budget. The majority of this overspend is in Adult & Community Services and Children's Services.

Adult and Community Services

By the end of the financial year, it is predicted that there will be a net overspend of £2.3m, against a budget of £229.5m. The main areas of budget pressure are:

- Care purchasing - £3.5m overspend
- Area Social Work Teams - £0.9m overspend

These will be offset by underspends totalling £2.1m in other areas of the directorate. This is being achieved by effective contract management and a slowdown in the use of the flexible dementia care service.

Children's Services

By the end of the financial year, it is predicted that there will be a net overspend of £6.4m, against a budget of £137.3m. The main areas of budget pressure are:

- Home to School Transport - £3.2m overspend
- Corporate Parenting - £4.6m overspend
- Specialist Social Care Teams - £1.1m overspend

Home to School Transport – Cabinet to consider proposals for second time

In September, our Group prevented Cabinet from moving forward with a consultation on changes to school transport policy, by calling the decision in to Scrutiny. The Scrutiny Committee agreed with us that the pre-consultation period had been inadequate and that it would be premature to begin a consultation.

Since then, Suffolk County Council has run two workshops to engage with parents, schools and councillors. On 5 December, the Cabinet will once again be asked to approve the decision to go to consultation.

Councillors in the Liberal Democrat, Green and Independent Group have been working with schools and parents to come up with alternative solutions to the proposed changes, which would see over 3000 children lose their free school transport. We are not convinced that a change in policy would deliver the necessary savings, as has unfortunately been the case in Essex.

If the Cabinet approves the decision, the consultation period will run from 12 December 2017 to 28 February 2018 and I will update you with details on how to participate.

Cabinet agrees to sell West Meadows site to current residents

The Cabinet has agreed to sell the West Meadows Gypsy and Traveller site to current residents, who put forward a proposal to collectively buy the site. Whilst residents would own their individual plots, an entity would be formed to ensure collective ownership and management of shared spaces.

Selling to the residents will ensure that there is minimal risk of displacement and guarantees that West Meadows will remain a Gypsy and Traveller site. Residents have given a commitment to

retain ownership of their pitches for a minimum of 5 years, and have stated that they will not expect Suffolk County Council to undertake any further capital improvements to the site.

Education and Learning Infrastructure Plan

The Cabinet has approved the third version of the Education and Learning Infrastructure Plan, which identifies future need for school places across the county. Early indications suggest that increased demand for school places, driven by both population growth and new housing developments, may lead to the creation of approximately 25 new schools and 25 school expansions over the next 20 years.

Suffolk is facing reduced funding due to a change in DfE capital allocation methodology, which has caused Basic Need Grant funding to reduce from £11m to £2m in 2017-18. SCC is working closely with a wide range of partners to ensure a collaborative approach to infrastructure planning, and has committed to a significant level of borrowing to ensure that adequate funds are available to meet the solutions laid out in the plan. They will also need to secure developer contributions, to cover the costs of education infrastructure arising as a result of new housing developments.

The plan is a “living document”, and will be annually reviewed and updated.