

## **January Report 2023**

### **Keeping people in Suffolk warm this winter**

Following a successful pilot in November, Suffolk Winter Warmth launched this week to support residents who are struggling to heat their homes.

Suffolk Winter Warmth provides vital support to families in need of a little extra help to keep warm and avoid ill health.

There are more than 250 voluntary warm spaces across Suffolk, and all Suffolk Libraries will act as warm, safe spaces this winter. A map of warm spaces in Suffolk can be found on the Rural Coffee Caravan website: <https://ruralcoffeecaravan.org.uk/map/>

If your community would like to set up its own Warm Space to support local residents this winter, guidance is available from Rural Coffee Caravan and Community Action Suffolk at: <https://ruralcoffeecaravan.org.uk/winter-warmth/#warmspaces>

### **Why plans for devolution are a big deal for Suffolk**

In August last year, the Government invited county councils across the country to step forward if they were ambitious enough to see a future where more decisions about important local priorities were made, not in Whitehall, but by local people who know what is needed.

We were delighted when the Government heard our calls and named Suffolk as one of only nine areas in the country where they were interested in actively negotiating a county devolution deal.

We fought for the greatest possible devolution of the Government's immense spending powers and for control of policy areas on which we could deliver significant improvements for our residents. It will secure greater decision-making powers around transport, infrastructure and skills and give us the powers we need to help us achieve our net zero ambitions and create the Greenest County.

The deal also sets out the government's plans to devolve more power to Suffolk County Council through:

- **Investment:** It will bring decades of funding worth £480 million to improve the lives of Suffolk's residents and spend on their local priorities.
- **Housing:** The deal will provide £5.8 million to regenerate brownfield land into beautiful, affordable homes and drive economic growth across the area; Suffolk will also receive greater compulsory purchase powers.
- **Education:** The agreement devolves the Adult Education Budget so they can shape provision in a way that best suits the needs of residents and the local Suffolk economy.
- **Transport:** An integrated transport settlement starting in 2024/25, to support the area to improve key transport infrastructure priorities.
- **The Environment:** The new deal will help Suffolk deliver on its ambitions to be the country's greenest county with £3 million to improve energy efficiency in homes.

The Government had informed us that the Chancellor would announce - among the many measures designed to steady the UK economy - that a devolution deal had been reached with Suffolk. Suffolk's

devolution deal requires no such additional layer of bureaucracy, nor the public-funding associated with it.

That is because we are seeking to have powers and funding devolved to Suffolk County Council – under the control of a directly-elected leader and cabinet – scrutinised by councillors and ultimately accountable to the people of Suffolk. If agreed, this would deliver decades of significant additional investment into local priorities that will improve the lives and outcomes of Suffolk’s residents.

This is a ‘minded to’ decision and will be followed by a full public consultation where everyone will get their say.

### **Council to protect frontline services and increase funding in budget proposal**

Adult care services and children’s services will receive £47m more funding as part of Suffolk County Council’s £685m budget proposals, published today.

Adult care services will have £34m more in their budget, and children’s services will have a further £13m. This will help with the extra expense needed to meet the huge increase in demands for services, as well as higher costs due to inflation.

Some of the service areas where people also said they wanted to see more money spent, will receive additional funding:

- £700,000 for SEND services to support new recruitment, which is on top of the £1.1m invested this year
- £500,000 for Highways: to use environmentally friendly weed treatments, and stop using glyphosate which can damage wildlife
- £110,000 for tree management: to support the ‘right tree right place’ policy, having an appropriate inspection regime and supporting the resulting tree management requirements.
- £45,000 for Citizens Advice: to support work during cost-of-living challenges

Under the proposals, the council’s budget would increase by 9.6% (from £625.3m to £685.3). Additional funds would come from a total 3.99% increase in Council Tax, and an increase in funds from the Government for adult and children’s social care.

Regarding Council Tax, the proposed 3.99% increase would be made up of a 1.99% increase in general Council Tax and a 2.00% increase dedicated to funding adult care.

This means costs for a household would look like:

- Band B property: £22.32 per week (85 pence per week increase from 2022-23) (Band B properties are the most common in Suffolk)
- Band D property: £28.70 per week (£1.10 pence per week increase from 2022-23)

Over 2,600 local people contributed to an online survey and focus groups, asking where they would spend more money, spend less money, and their views on Council Tax. The top service areas where people wanted to spend more, were social care services for adults and children.

The proposed budget will be discussed at the council's Scrutiny meeting on 10 January 2023, then presented at the Cabinet meeting on 24 January, with the final budget debated and voted on at Full Council on 9 February.

### **Suffolk County Council becomes a Disability Confident Leader**

This achievement recognises the progress the council has made to make both its recruitment processes and working environment more inclusive for disabled people and follows the council attaining Disability Confident Employer status in 2017.

Becoming a Disability Confident Leader means that the County Council will also act as a champion in supporting other businesses in the area to become Disability Confident.

Over 80% of disabilities are invisible, In Suffolk County Council, 61% of staff have declared their status, the council aims to increase this number with the measures it has put in place in becoming a Disability Confident Leader.