

2017/18 highlights

CLlr Karen Soons - County Councillor for Thingoe South. Annual Parish Report.

On 4 May 2017, I was
delighted to be elected as
your County Councillor.

I stood for election because I fundamentally believe that everyone deserves efficient, diligent and effective public representation, however they voted.

2110 people voted for me on a 43% turn out, I am hugely appreciative to hold a majority of 1674, this equates to 68% share of the vote. There are 75 Suffolk County Councillors, 52 are now Conservative County Councillors.

I am honoured to represent you in Thingoe South Division.

Shortly after the election I was appointed Chair of the Audit Committee and signed off the County Council's accounts (with an out turn of £505m). SCC is the largest corporation in Suffolk. After 4 months, I moved in order to hold the responsibility for all the Children in Suffolk with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities, this involved overseeing the High Needs Funding, Public Consultation, ending in Feb 2018. My current responsibility is that of Deputy Chair of the SCC Pension Fund Committee. I am looking forward to the challenge of helping to oversee the move to regional Pooling (where 11 Local Authority Pension Funds join forces to utilise their Economies of Scale to their best advantage). Our SCC Pension Committee Chairman has successfully become the Chairman of the entire Pooled Group.

We stood on a manifesto of strong financial control. We are always mindful that it's your hard-earned money that pays for the services we provide to the most vulnerable people in Suffolk, from protecting children to helping older people with social care support. After one of the worst winters on record, with a number of extremely damaging frosts, we have begun the permanent repair programme - as we do each year, once our crews have stopped their gritting work. We spend about £60M a year on our roads and we all want to spend more. That's why, as per our manifesto, we are borrowing £21M over the next 4 years to surface dress over 1,000 miles of our 4,000 mile network.

More news highlights from 2017/18

Here is a selection of news items from Suffolk County Council that featured over the last 12 months. For further details on any of these stories, and more, visit <https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/council-news/>.

Samuel Ward Academy Trust becomes first Research School in East of England

On 7 April 2017, it was announced that Samuel Ward Academy Trust has become the first official Research School in the East of England.

The Samuel Ward Academy Trust, which has 15 schools in the Haverhill, Newmarket, Sudbury and Bury St Edmunds areas, has been awarded £200,000 funding to become a focal point for educational research. The Trust will be one of only 11 Research Schools in the country and will be jointly funded through Suffolk County Council's Raising the Bar programme and the Education Endowment Foundation, as part of the strategic partnership between EEF and Suffolk County Council to bring the best education research to the county.

As well as supporting teaching and learning across the Trust, they will be instrumental in sharing good classroom practice across schools in Suffolk, working in partnership with the Teaching Schools and the county's School-to-School Support Partnership.

Suffolk passes 90% fibre broadband milestone as commitment to connect entire county is reiterated

On 21 July 2017, new figures were published that show that nine out of every 10 homes and businesses in Suffolk now have superfast broadband available. Suffolk County Council and Openreach have signed a new contract to extend coverage to 98% during 2020. Plans are being developed for the remaining 2% to complete the Better Broadband for Suffolk programme.

Around 315,000 properties now have the option of using fibre broadband, an increase of more than 127,000 from when the Better Broadband for Suffolk programme started deployment in 2013. It comes as Suffolk County Council reiterates its commitment to provide high-speed internet access for all properties in the county – no-one will be left behind.

Energy Efficiency grants now available for local retail businesses in Suffolk

In August 2017, it was announced that recent changes to European funding rules mean that retail businesses across Suffolk can access grants for energy efficiency measures. Suffolk County Council is collaborating with Norfolk County Council to use EU funding to support businesses from a range of sectors. A number of shops have already benefitted from free and independent advice and a change in the funding regulations means that shops can now also access grants towards the capital costs of any energy saving measure.

The Carbon Trust calculate that taking 20 per cent off the energy spend of any business is equivalent to a 5 per cent increase in sales.

Suffolk County Council's Children's Services continue to improve following Ofsted pilot inspection and are rate 'Good' in all areas.

On 6 November 2017, it was announced that the council's Children's Services are now rated 'Good' in all areas. Ofsted have developed a new framework for their future inspections of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS). Earlier this year, Suffolk County Council was asked to be a pilot site for this new inspection framework.

Suffolk County Council's Children's Services were previously judged 'Good' overall at the end of 2015, a grade that only a third of Local Authorities have achieved.

Whilst this was positive, the council recognised that there were still areas for improvement and Ofsted's latest report reflects the action taken to improve in all areas. All areas are now judged to be 'Good'. This puts Suffolk County Council in the top 25% of all Local Authorities.

Suffolk County Council's 2018/19 budget proposals published

On 14 November 2017, proposals to balance Suffolk County Council's budget in 2018/19 were published. These included an option to increase the basic rate of council tax for the first time in seven years and a range of savings plans.

All local authorities across the country continue to face significant challenges to meet frontline service requirements in a climate where there is less money and resource available. Once again, the council has carefully considered financial forecasts and projected demand to ensure the most vulnerable people in society continue to receive the highest level of support possible in the future.

The council also continues to develop new and innovative ways to deliver services and make further savings. This includes using digital technology to improve efficiency and ensuring health and social care services working better together to improve access for the people that need help. These programmes will support the authority as it seeks to make savings of £56 million by 2021.

Suffolk is chosen as one of only 10 pilot areas to retain 100% of business rates

On 20 December 2017, the amount of money allocated to each Local Authority in England for the next financial year was announced by the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, Sajid Javid.

As part of the announcement, Suffolk County Council was named as one of the pilot areas for a new Government scheme to retain 100% of business rates from Council Tax in 2018/19. In future, Business Rates will be an even greater income stream for all local authorities.

Fully funded first-time central heating systems for Suffolk residents

On 14 December 2017 we reported that Suffolk's local authorities are now able to provide fully funded central heating systems* to 514 fuel poor households across Suffolk over the next three years. Around 4 million UK households are in fuel poverty, unable to affordably heat their home to the temperature needed to stay warm and healthy. As well as being on low incomes many of

these households are also faced with the additional burden of relying on heating systems that are inefficient and expensive to run.

The local authorities working together as the Suffolk Climate Change Partnership have been successful in securing funding from the first round of the Warm Homes Fund for a project worth £4.3 million. The Suffolk project is being managed by the County Council, administered by Suffolk Warm Homes Healthy People based at Suffolk Coastal District Council and supported with further funding from Babergh, Mid-Suffolk, Forest Heath and Waveney District Councils plus Ipswich and St Edmundsbury Borough Councils. Alongside the first-time heating system, households will also be able to benefit from new insulation measures to make the homes more energy efficient as well as grants from the Suffolk Community Foundation's 'Surviving Winter Appeal' where eligible.

*subject to survey and conditions

Additional £21 million to resurface and repair Suffolk's roads

On 15 January 2018, Suffolk County Council announced new plans to invest an additional £21 million in resurfacing and repairing the county's roads in the next three years.

The plans will see 1,000 miles of roads in Suffolk resurfaced by March 2021, a quarter of all the roads that Suffolk County Council is responsible for. This is a commitment made in the council's Our Priorities report published in 2017.

This investment will improve the quality of roads, reduce the number of potholes and enhance the experience of Suffolk's road users. It also makes sound financial sense as preventing deterioration will avoid the need to spend more money on reactive maintenance over the same period and in future years. Over 227 miles of Suffolk roads were surface dressed or machined surfaced during the summer of 2017.

The funding will boost Suffolk Highways' road maintenance and improvement spending in 2018/19 alone by 21% - £40 million in total. The extra money will be allocated to roads and infrastructure where there is the greatest need. These works will be planned carefully to make the most of the warmer summer weather when surface dressing needs to be done and conditions are the best for machine surfacing. This work will be fully coordinated to reduce the impact on road users.

A reminder: You can access up-to-date information about roadworks, road and street closures and how they affect you, as well as information about road improvements projects in Suffolk. The interactive map can be found at www.suffolk.roadworks.org

Revised GCSE and A Level results reflect progress of Suffolk students

The Department for Education published revised GCSE and A Level results on 25 January 2018.

The validated figures confirm that 3% more students in Suffolk are achieving the expected standards in English and Maths at GCSE compared with last year. 63.1% of students in the county are achieving the expected standard in English and Maths and Suffolk has closed the gap to national to less than 1%. Suffolk has also risen by 26 places in national league tables for this

measure, to 83rd out of 151 authorities. The county has risen 5 places in national rankings for the percentage of students achieving the English Baccalaureate.

The Revised A Level figures confirm that Suffolk pupils have once again performed well with the General Applied entry and Tech Level entries remaining above the national average figures.

Since the launch of the council's Raising the Bar programme in 2012, Suffolk has risen 59 places in national rankings for GCSE attainment in English and Maths. 87% of schools in Suffolk are judged by Ofsted to be 'Good' or 'Outstanding'.

New Chief Executive for Suffolk County Council

In March 2018, Nicola Beach was appointed as Suffolk County Council's new Chief Executive.

Nicola, who is currently Executive Director of Infrastructure and Environment at Essex County Council, will take up her new role this summer. She was appointed due to the wealth of experience she has in local government, having been Chief Executive at Braintree District Council before joining Essex County Council, and having held various other roles in authorities across the East of England.

Sporting delights

About 2,000 swimmers took part in the Great East Swim on Saturday 17 June, swimming distances between 250m and 10km, with some including the new Swim/Run challenge event. An estimated 6,000 spectators supporting family and friends were there from all over the UK and it was an opportunity to show some of what the county has to offer as a future tourist destination.

The first Great East Run, a half marathon, was held in Ipswich on Sunday 24 September 2017. The race reached its capacity, with all 3,000 places selling out in a matter of months.

On Friday 8 September 2017, Newmarket and Aldeburgh hosted the Suffolk stage of the OVO Energy Tour of Britain. This is the first time a full stage of Britain's premier road cycling race has taken place in Suffolk. Stage 6 was 183km long, and it started in Newmarket and finished in Aldeburgh. The last time the Tour was here (2015) it generated an economic impact for Suffolk of £2.2million, even though only half the stage was in the county – the whole stage, which was shared with Norfolk, generated £4.5million. The event also provides the opportunity to engage communities along the route to use the event to showcase their locality to a national and international audience, bring communities together and inspire people to be more active.

