Cllr Karen Soons

@KarenSoons

KarenSoonsforWestSuffolk

karen.soons@suffolk.gov.uk

07864 601 887

January 2022 Parish Newsletter

Children's services and adult care at the heart of Suffolk County Council's new budget plans

Suffolk County Council has outlined how it plans to spend money on public services in 2022/23.

- More money to support children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)
- Extra resources for adults in need of care
- Additional funds to prevent flooding and fix footpaths

Under the proposals, the council's budget for 2022-23 would rise by 4.5% (from £598.2 to £625.4m). This additional money is generated by a 2.99% increase in Council Tax, and an increase in grants received from the Government.

The proposals will be presented at a scrutiny meeting in January, then put forward for approval by councillors in February.

Councillor Richard Rout, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Environment at Suffolk County Council, said:

"I've worked with my colleagues to propose a budget which will not see any reductions in our services, and invests further where it is most needed. Our aim is always to provide the best possible services for everyone in Suffolk and provide value for money.

"This has been a difficult budget to consider, particularly as Covid continues to make life challenging on every level, including our finances.

"We also continue to face rising costs and hugely increasing demands on our services year on year, particularly our adult care and children's services.

"But this is a budget which helps us to respond to these demands, and meets our priorities for next year. For example increasing our family services budget by £1.1m from next year, to specifically to address the recommendations made by the recent independent SEND review – this is in addition to our previous commitment of £45m to develop SEND provision."

The council's priorities are to:

- promote and support the health and wellbeing of all people in Suffolk

- strengthen the local economy
- protect and enhance the environment
- provide value for money for the Suffolk taxpayer

Some of the detail of the budget proposals, includes:

- £1.1m increase for the family services budget, specifically to address recommendations made by the recent independent SEND review
- £1m additional funding for Suffolk Highways over the next four years, for example to fund road signs and responsible verge cutting
- £10m to specifically deliver an increasing number of drainage schemes (over the next three years)
- £10m to improve footpath quality and access (over the next three years)
- £12.8m to decarbonise the buildings that we own (by 2030)
- Investments this year to set up future borrowing for bigger schemes, such as SEND and carbon reduction

Regarding Council Tax, the proposed 2.99% increase would be made up of a 1.99% increase in general Council Tax and a 1.00% increase dedicated to funding adult care.

This means costs for a household would look like:

- Band D property: £27.60 per week (80 pence per week increase from 2021-22)
- Band B property: £21.47 per week (62 pence per week increase from 2021-22) (Band B properties are the most common in Suffolk)

Councillor Rout continued:

“Proposing an increase in council tax is not a decision we take lightly, particularly when our costs of living are going up too.

“However, I think there is increasing recognition of the pressure our services are under. In our public consultation, there were more people who agreed that council tax would need to go up next year, compared to those that didn’t. This was especially true for funding adult care.

“By paying this extra each week, we are all helping the council to provide its key services, and helping support those who need it most.

“If anyone does have concerns about paying their council tax, they may be eligible for the Council Tax Reduction Scheme, which is managed by our borough and district councils. You could receive help if you are on a low income, even if you are working.”
The budget proposals will be presented at a Scrutiny Meeting on Tuesday 11 January 2022, with the final budget discussed at a Full Council meeting on 17 February 2022.

The Scrutiny meeting will be available to stream on Suffolk County Council’s YouTube channel, and public questions can be submitted in advance, details available at **www.suffolk.gov.uk**

Annual Public Health Report focuses on Mental Health impact of Covid-19

On December 2nd Suffolk County Council endorsed far-reaching recommendations to improve Suffolk people's mental health and wellbeing.

This includes the creation of a dedicated fund of £2.5m and the development of a cross-system group to support community wellbeing in Suffolk.

Each year, the Director of Public Health in Suffolk produces an independent report, which explores a topic or area of strategic focus that is of importance to Suffolk. This year's report titled "Better, together: Public Mental Health in Suffolk", focuses on the actions that need to be taken to support and enable good mental health and wellbeing in the community, following the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The strains of the Covid-19 pandemic have meant that the issue of mental health has been in the public consciousness like never before. The unprecedented measures required to reduce the spread of the virus, have placed extraordinary pressures, and demands on the whole population, with around 1 in 5 adults in Britain experiencing some form of depression in the first three months of 2021 – more than double the figure prior to the pandemic. Almost half of adults have reported that their emotional and mental wellbeing has been affected.

The report highlights that those impacts may be as damaging and long-lasting as the physical effects of the virus. It focuses on actions which can be taken by communities, public and private sector organisations to try and mitigate these effects and protect and promote good public mental health in Suffolk now and for the future.

Stuart Keeble, Director of Public Health, said:

"Every single person in Suffolk has had their life disrupted to some degree by the Covid-19 pandemic, and while the vaccines are currently doing a good job of protecting the majority of us from serious illness, the longer-term impacts on mental health and emotional wellbeing continue to evolve.

"It is important to remember and honour what has occurred – both the terrible losses, and the extraordinary individual and collective acts of courage and kindness made by so many to protect and support others.

"Communities, workplaces, and public sector organisations must come together to create places and environments which support mental and emotional wellbeing across the whole of Suffolk."
The report makes six recommendations, which have today been endorsed by Suffolk County Council. Among the recommendations is the development of a cross system group focused on public mental health, which will report into the Health and Wellbeing Board, and a dedicated Suffolk Public Mental Health Fund to support good public mental health in Suffolk communities.

The £2.5m funding, comes from the Government's Contain Outbreak Management Fund (COMF), in recognition of the need to support Public Mental Health, which in turn both supports behaviours which continue to reduce the spread of the virus as well as supporting longer term recovery. The Health and Wellbeing Board will oversee this and will be discussing principles for how to deliver the recommendations at its next meeting in January.

Councillor Matthew Hicks, Leader of Suffolk County Council and Chair of the Health and Wellbeing Board, said:

"It is clear that the time to focus on improving public mental health is now.

"Mental wellbeing continues to be a priority for the Health and Wellbeing Board, and the County Council, as we recover from the Covid-19 pandemic.

"Keeping mentally well is not only vital for individuals and families, but also for communities and the economy. The people of Suffolk stand the strongest chance of getting Better, Together."
The 2021 Annual Public Health Report for Suffolk, 'Better, Together: Public Mental Health in Suffolk' **can be viewed online here.**

Katch electric taxi bus service now running to Snape Maltings

From December 6th, one of Suffolk's most popular destinations is in easy to reach without needing a car following the extension to electric taxi bus service Katch.

The on-demand service now runs to Snape Maltings, the arts, retail, and heritage site on the banks of the River Alde, near Aldeburgh.

With its converted Victorian buildings, Snape Maltings is home to independent shops and galleries and several performance venues, including the world-famous Snape Maltings Concert Hall.

Katch is led by Suffolk County Council in partnership with **CarsSmart**, and with support from East Suffolk Council, Framlingham Town Council, Wickham Market Parish Council, Community Rail Network, East Suffolk Lines Community Rail Partnership and Greater Anglia.

Katch helps deliver on the commitment Suffolk councils have made to grow the region's passenger transport in a sustainable way and plays a part in cutting carbon to help reach the Government's ambition of zero emissions by 2050 and Suffolk County Council's own target of being carbon neutral by 2030.

Katch is a travel solution for residents and visitors in Wickham Market and Framlingham, as well as enabling people using the Ipswich – Lowestoft train line to book the taxi bus for a journey to Snape Maltings from Wickham Market railway station in Campsea Ashe.

It uses electric vehicles operating as shared taxi buses serving Framlingham - Wickham Market - Wickham Market Railway Station (at Campsea Ashe) - Tunstall - Snape Maltings - Snape.

It serves fixed bus stops and journeys can be booked on-demand by telephone or via the Katch app, charging fares in line with a bus service. Payment can be made by contactless card or cash.

Councillor Alexander Nicoll, Suffolk County Council's Deputy Cabinet Member for Transport Strategy and county councillor for the Wickham division (covering Wickham Market and Campsea Ashe) said:

"I am delighted Katch is now able to help people visit Snape Maltings, which is such a popular arts and heritage destination.

"It is only by making public transport a viable alternative for all in our county that we will get more people to leave their cars at home, which will play a big part in our efforts to reduce vehicle emissions and cut carbon.

"Katch is also part of our wider strategy to help, especially rural, communities with better public transport connections to facilitate work, education and leisure needs."

Suffolk County Council approves extra £20m investment in highway drainage and footpaths

It was announced on December 7th that Cabinet members have committed an extra £20 million over the next three years into further improving Suffolk's highway drainage systems and footpaths.

In recognition of the increasing maintenance demand on these areas, councillors approved the use of £10 million to specifically deliver an increasing number of drainage schemes that deal with problems that affect larger numbers of people, and a further £10 million to improve footpath quality and access.

Suffolk Highways will use the drainage investment alongside funding from the Department for Transport to increase the number of highway flooding sites which are resolved, providing a highway network that is more resilient and accessible during heavy rain and severe weather events.

The footpath investment will be focused on urban areas and busy footpaths in rural areas - providing a safer and more accessible network that supports people accessing local bus services, health care services and local shopping precincts.

Councillor Paul West, Suffolk County Council's cabinet member for operational highways and flooding, said:

"Committing this extra funding is a very welcome boost to our already significant improvement programmes in highways.

"The integrity of our county's drainage systems and footpaths are incredibly important to our livelihoods; functioning drainage systems and well-paved paths support us all to safely travel for work, social or leisure purposes or to access essential services.

"£20m divided across drainage and footpath services will enable our highways teams to resolve more drainage issues, where there may be significant highway or property flooding; and footpath improvements to provide a safer and more accessible network in urban and busy rural areas.

"I look forward to working closely with the teams to ensure that the additional funding is used appropriately; targeting areas that require essential improvements, on a priority basis. I will continue to keep Suffolk's residents informed on how any additional funding is going to be used."

Architecture and building award win for The Hold

On the December 8th, The Hold, the new archives and heritage centre on Ipswich Waterfront, won a prestigious national architecture and building award for the public sector.

SPACES, the Society for Public Architecture, Construction, Engineering and Surveying, named The Hold as the winner in the Community Category at their online award ceremony.

The awards are dedicated to rewarding excellence, collaboration and innovation in construction projects delivered within the public sector and, because they were unable to hold the awards in 2020, included two years' worth of projects.

The Hold first opened to the public in September 2020 and was officially opened by His Royal Highness The Duke of Gloucester in September 2021. The £20million building is a partnership between Suffolk County Council and the University of Suffolk and is home to more than nine centuries of history safely preserved by Suffolk Archives.

The SPACES awards judges said:

The Hold is "A great example of community architecture which actively brings together different user groups, whilst highlighting the value of local historical records."
They added:

"On the judge's visit, it was clear to see the passion the end user had for the building and what it represents to the community, and praise goes to the Architect and wider delivery team for creating such a valuable asset."

Councillor Andrew Reid, Cabinet Member for Heritage at Suffolk County Council, said:

"It is great news that The Hold has been recognised as such a valuable community building, especially against such strong competition."

Anne Jenkins, Director England, Midlands & East at The National Lottery Heritage Fund, said:

"Thanks to the National Lottery players, we were able to support Suffolk County Council in building the new archives and heritage centre in Ipswich and it is hugely impressive that the quality of the architecture and the contribution to the community of The Hold has been recognised in winning this national award."

Significant investment in firefighting equipment secures safer future for Suffolk

On December 10th, Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service added to the lifesaving kit at its disposal – cementing the county's continued commitment to protecting its people.

A significant investment from the service in new equipment has seen the introduction of digital radios, smoke hoods and smoke curtains – benefitting both residents and firefighters across Suffolk.

The state-of-the-art digital handheld radios offer a clearer and greater range than previous models – vastly improving communication between firefighters when attending incidents.

These are accompanied by two pieces of new equipment designed specifically to reduce the harmful impact of smoke. All fire engines will now carry escape smoke hoods – enabling firefighters to protect people when rescuing or evacuating them from fires. Smoke curtains have also been introduced to help ensure that escape routes are kept clear of smoke, while also aiding in protecting property by reducing smoke damage.

This equipment can be used in a range of incidents, with it already proving invaluable in Lowestoft earlier today, where two occupants were rescued from a property following a kitchen fire suspected to have been caused by cooking left unattended.

Cllr Andrew Reid, cabinet member for Public Health, Public Protection and Communities commented:

"I am delighted that this significant investment by Suffolk and Fire and Rescue Service has paved the way for state-of-the-art apparatus to be at the disposal of every firefighter in the county, which could, potentially, prove to be lifesaving.

"This complements the addition of four new enhanced rescue vehicles for the service earlier this year – supporting our continued commitment to providing fire staff with the best possible equipment as we all work towards a safer Suffolk."
Jon Lacey, Chief Officer of Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service said:

"This new equipment will ensure the safety of our firefighters when attending incidents, while also protecting the public from harmful smoke and the immense damage this can cause to property.

"Although our crews are ready to attend emergency calls with this life-saving equipment, I'd urge everyone at home to test their own life-saving equipment – smoke alarms. At this time of year we are cooking more in kitchen, plugging in festive lights, burning candles or using the fireplace, all of which come with a fire risk. Have a happy and safe holiday by making sure you have smoke alarms fitted, and test them regularly."
Further advice on fire prevention is available on the council's website: **www.suffolk.gov.uk/suffolk-fire-and-rescue-service/fire-safety-in-the-home/**

Suffolk has shown determination and resilience in our Covid fight – this is another challenge we must overcome

A column published on December 14th – By Matthew Hicks.

It has been just 14 days since I last wrote this column on concerns about a 'new' COVID-19 variant called Omicron. Sadly, so much has happened in that time.

We have seen first-hand the speed in which Omicron can spread – doubling in 2 or 3 days, some places quicker.

The UK has been placed in level 4, the second highest tier, because of this doubling time.

And Plan B has been enacted by the Government.

It is a very unsettled time for us again, which is difficult with Christmas just days away. In his speech on Sunday evening, Boris Johnson, made no excuse for the seriousness of the situation we now face. He spoke about the emergency we now face in our fight against Omicron and the fact there may be a tidal wave of cases coming in the next few weeks.

But he also spoke of hope and a way out – and this is vaccinations. It has recently been discovered, as we learn new things about Omicron daily, that the booster jab is highly effective against Omicron and because of this, the Government has asked the NHS to step-up the booster roll-out.

This means that the booster is now open to every adult over the age of 30 who has had a second dose of the vaccine at least three months ago. Those that are 18 and over can book from tomorrow. Johnson's message is clear 'Get Boosted Now'.

In Suffolk, a vast amount of work is being done to increase our capacity to deliver this. We will keep you updated when plans are finalised, but at the moment we are looking to maximise our current vaccination sites by increasing the hours they are open and offering more days. NHS colleagues currently deliver about 7,000 vaccinations a day – this will increase to just short of 21,000 each day. This is an extraordinary effort and I want to thank people for their hard work in making this happen.

Colleagues from Suffolk County Council and Public Health Suffolk are doing all they can to support this NHS roll-out. There is little doubt that this delivery will have big implications for the NHS and wider health system, but as the Prime Minister said, the impact on the health service will be greater in the longer term if people do not get fully protected from Omicron.

Today I also wanted to address any reluctance that people may have in taking Omicron seriously. At this point scientists cannot say if Omicron is less severe, but we do know that it is more transmissible. Therefore if it spreads to people in Suffolk who are unvaccinated or vulnerable we would risk more hospital admissions and overwhelming the NHS.

This is not a risk that should be taken lightly. It takes 10 days to identify an Omicron case so we know case numbers will be much higher than reported.

Last week, the Prime Minister announced Plan B measures in order to combat the growth of Omicron. Measures to be introduced as part of Plan B, include:

- Face coverings to become compulsory in most public indoor venues, other than hospitality (from Friday 10 December)
- People asked to work from home if they can (from Monday 13 December)
- NHS Covid Pass to be mandatory in specific settings, using a negative test or full vaccination via the NHS Covid Pass (from Wednesday 15 December, subject to parliamentary approval)

I ask that as we continue to live with COVID we keep safety in mind, such as washing hands, wearing a mask and making sure your house is well ventilated.

Suffolk has shown time and time again it's determination and resilience in our fight against COVID – this is another challenge we must overcome. Throughout the pandemic, Suffolk has been effective at tackling COVID. This is because we have worked hard and been proactive at every stage. The situation facing Suffolk now calls for the same forward-thinking and preventative work to protect residents, businesses and our way of life.

My final ask of you echoes the Prime Minister's appeal - make sure you are up-to-date with your vaccinations. These are not just empty words, science shows that vaccinations save lives. **Find out about the booster vaccine at NHS.uk**.

As the Prime Minister said:

- Get Boosted Now for yourself, for your friends and your family.
- Get Boosted Now to protect jobs and livelihoods across this country.
- And Get Boosted Now to protect our NHS, our freedoms and our way of life.

Katch scoops honour at Community Rail Awards

It was announced on December 15th that Katch, Suffolk's electric taxi bus service, was abuzz after winning a national award.

The on-demand service won the Influencing Positive Change & Sustainability category in the Community Rail Awards.

Katch is led by Suffolk County Council in partnership with CarsSmart, and with support from East Suffolk Council, Framlingham Town Council, Wickham Market Parish Council, Community Rail Network, East Suffolk Lines Community Rail Partnership and Greater Anglia.

The award was presented at an evening held at the Guildhall in Southampton.

Councillor Alexander Nicoll, Suffolk County Council's Deputy Cabinet Member for Transport Strategy, said:

"This award for Katch is well-deserved recognition of the hard work, led by Suffolk County Council in partnership with others, to create the service as a new and green travel solution for people in a largely rural area and offers an alternative to private car use.

"Katch plays an important part in Suffolk councils' commitment to growing the region's passenger transport in a sustainable way and to cutting carbon to help reach the Government's ambition of zero emissions by 2050 and the County Council's own target of being carbon neutral by 2030."

Katch is a travel solution for residents and visitors in Wickham Market and Framlingham, as well as enabling people using the Ipswich – Lowestoft train line to book the taxi bus for a journey to Snape Maltings from Wickham Market railway station in Campsea Ashe.

It uses electric vehicles operating as shared taxi buses serving Framlingham - Wickham Market - Wickham Market Railway Station (at Campsea Ashe) - Tunstall - Snape Maltings - Snape.
Katch serves fixed bus stops and journeys can be booked on-demand by telephone or via the Katch app, charging fares in line with a bus service. Payment can be made by contactless card or cash.

The service was launched last May, initially as a one-year pilot, and was recently extended to serve popular arts and entertainment complex Snape Maltings.

Katch is available seven days a week, Monday to Friday 7.50am to 8pm, Saturday 8am to 8pm, Sundays and Bank Holidays 10am to 6pm.

Journeys can be booked up to 30 minutes in advance via the Katch App or telephone by calling 01728 554455.

The cost of a return journey is £7 and a single journey is £4 for an adult or children's fares are £3 return and £1.50 single.

For further information about Katch visit **www.katchalift.com**

Over 10,000 new LED streetlights installed across Suffolk

On December 17th Suffolk's LED replacement programme reached a new milestone, with over 10,000 streetlights upgraded with new, sustainable LEDs.

Bouygues Energies & Services, the contractor leading the programme has successfully installed 10,799 new lanterns and counting as part of the project to replace all 43,400

streetlights in the county. These lanterns use less energy and produce a more natural and focused light than the traditional orange glow of streetlights.

The project, which is due to complete by the end of 2022 will also allow opportunity for other streetlight owners within Suffolk such as Parish and District Councils to upgrade their streetlights as part of this process.

This upgrade supports Suffolk County Council's ambitions for becoming a carbon-neutral organisation by 2030. The benefits include; supporting a reduction in carbon emissions by saving energy and reducing light pollution, as well as providing clearer images on CCTV, traffic cameras and dashcam footage for the benefit of public safety.

The teams have been working their way through the west of the county and are making progress in Stowmarket and Sudbury.

Aside from the reduction in energy usage and minimising light pollution, the project will also bring down ongoing maintenance costs for the authority. The County Council expects to reduce its annual electricity costs on the streetlights by around 76%, saving more than £1.7 million a year.

By upgrading the lighting system with smart technology, this will increase the control the County Council has over its power consumption which will further reduce costs.

Prior to commencing in towns or parishes, Suffolk Highways is contacting those councils in case they wish to upgrade their parish-council owned street-lighting at the same time. All heritage-style lanterns which have been identified will be upgraded towards the end of the programme.

Councillor Paul West, Suffolk County Council's Cabinet Member responsible for Operational Highways and Flooding, said:

"Despite the obvious challenges we have faced since the start of this project, I am extremely happy with the progress being made to replace all county council streetlights in Suffolk.

"The project brings many positive changes, with the main one being the reduction in energy use. This will go towards Suffolk County Council's ambitions to become a carbon-neutral organisation by 2030. I congratulate the teams involved for their hard work and determination during trying times and look forward to seeing more of the county benefiting from these upgrades."

Show social care a little love this winter

On December 21st the county council launched its first ever dedicated campaign about Social Care.

The campaign is designed to help the public understand more about the Social Care sector in Suffolk, how the various partners and organisations work together to provide care for

people, celebrate the amazing care professionals that work in the sector and ask the public for a little patience and flexibility as we all navigate through one of the toughest winters any of us can remember.

Adult Social Care in Suffolk is made up of a close partnership of different organisations including local councils, NHS Trusts, and several private care providers who, when taken together, employ around 22,000 individuals countywide. On any given day the sector supports over 9,500 people to live independently for longer whilst enjoying their lives to the fullest. The sector faces considerable challenges however, including the recruitment and retention of key workers, the increasing complexity of care packages and the ongoing impact of the Coronavirus pandemic, especially on care homes, home care and front-line workers.

To try and demonstrate how busy the sector is, every day the county council's Customer First contact centre handles, on average, over 551 phone calls, webchats, or emails from people about adult social care. On Christmas Day alone, there will be around 1,200 care home staff working hard to ensure that the 5,662 people currently living in Residential or Nursing Homes in Suffolk get to enjoy a good Christmas. Then, on top of that, there are the 3,000 or so home care workers who will be out and about across Suffolk, offering help and support to people who are receiving care within their own homes. Therefore, it is so important that we all show the Social Care sector a little love and support this winter. Please be patient when contacting any Social Care service. They are all working as hard as they can to provide essential support for people. They will do their best to answer you and provide the best care possible as quickly as they can.

I also hope that this campaign will change the way we think and talk about those people who have made working in Social Care their career and passion. Too often those working in the sector are either incorrectly swept up and talked about as if being part of the NHS or worse, forgotten about in conversations entirely. These incredible people have made the choice to dedicate their working lives to the care of others. Whether social workers, mental health practitioners, occupational therapists, home care workers, care home and nursing home staff, and every other role I don’t have space here to list - all of them, together, deserve our praise and thanks for the value they bring to people's lives, and our wider community (and yes – I think they should be paid more too). But, to start with, I invite you to join with me in challenging anyone you see or hear using words like "unskilled" to describe anyone working in Social Care. Ask them to stop, think, and then try again - because of all the words we could use to describe these wonderful people, “unskilled” is certainly not one of them. They are professional care givers and need to be treated with the respect they deserve.

I know that changing perceptions can take time, but we must make a start, and that start is this new campaign.

You can get involved very easily. To start with show your support for Social Care by sharing the council’s posts on your own social media, using the hashtag **#SupportSocialCare**. You can help by being a little bit patient when contacting Social Care. Or go further and offer to collect an elderly neighbour’s prescription or just by pay them a visit to see how they are.

However you decide to get involved, please show Social Care a little love this winter.