

## **Report for Nedging with Naughton PC 13 March 2018 Robert**

### **Budget for 2018-19 confirmed**

On Thursday 8 February, the Council met to debate the budget proposals for 2018-19. The Liberal Democrat, Green and Independent Group were concerned by a number of the proposed cuts. These included a £12m cut to adult care, funding reductions for Citizens Advice and Trading Standards, and cuts to rural bus services. Therefore, we were unable to support the budget.

An amendment by the Labour group, which focused on reversing minor cuts, was voted down by the Conservative administration. The budget proposals were subsequently passed in full, but were not supported by any opposition councillors.

The budget for 2018-19 includes a 4.99% increase in council tax.

### **Concerns raised over accountability and transparency of Suffolk Public Sector Leaders**

The Suffolk Public Sector Leaders (SPSL) is made up of council leaders and chief executives from across Suffolk, as well as the PCC, chief fire officer and representatives from Suffolk's Clinical Commissioning Groups. This group controls a large pot of money, made up of £7.447m from the Suffolk business rates pool and £3.23m of central government funding received as part of the Transformation Challenge Award.

I and the rest of the Liberal Democrat, Green and Independent Group are very concerned about the accountability and transparency of this group. Their meetings are held in private with no minutes and neither residents nor councillors are made aware of the group's decisions, financial or otherwise. Given the vast amount of money they control, this secrecy is very concerning.

At the end of January, I and my group met with the Interim Chief Executive at Suffolk County Council to query why there is so little accountability within the leaders' group. I have been informed that, on the basis of our queries, the group will be reconsidering its governance arrangements. I will keep you informed of any further updates.

### **Next phase of "Raising the Bar" strategy announced**

The Cabinet has approved the Raising the Bar 2018-20 strategy. This is the third phase of the programme, which began in 2012 and is focused on improving educational standards throughout Suffolk.

The strategy includes the very ambitious goal to place the education system in Suffolk among the top 25% nationally. No other "shire" authority has achieved this, and the report acknowledges that it would likely take several years to reach this goal.

I am concerned that no new funding has been allocated to this phase of the Raising the Bar programme. The goals of the strategy are ambitious and will not be achievable without adequate investment, and so I question whether the Cabinet are fully committed to improving educational outcomes in Suffolk.

## **Suffolk to tender for contract to support adolescents on the edge of care**

Suffolk's Cabinet has agreed to set up a new outcomes-based contract, to provide intensive therapeutic support for adolescents at the edge of care via a private service provider. The idea is to reduce the need for and costs of adolescents coming into the care of Suffolk County Council, by providing intervention services that seek to keep children safely with their families. Payments will only be made if children are not taken into care, or are returned to their families.

The contract will be funded by a Social Impact Bond: this means that private investors will provide the start-up capital and running costs for the service, and will receive a return on investment if the service is successful at keeping children out of care. A similar contract and service exists in Essex, and a small number of local authorities across the UK are beginning to implement similar contracts

I am concerned about the use of a payment by results contract when vulnerable children are involved, given the risk of putting profit ahead of the wellbeing of these children. Suffolk County Council have assured me that the authority's team of social workers will oversee the service and prevent this from happening, but the administrative costs of doing this properly could be substantial.

The contract is due to be awarded in Summer 2018 with an autumn start date.

## **“Community self-help”**

Highways are consulting all parish councils on this. They want to see if there is an appetite for parishes to hire their own contractors or volunteers to do a lot of the minor highways work such as sign cleaning, pavement clearing that it can no longer afford to do. If there is it wants to find a way to accredit volunteers and contractors.