

Report for Nedging Parish Council by Robert Lindsay, Suffolk County Councillor for 9.1.2024

County Budget proposes £64m budget cuts over 2 years

The complete axeing of £535k funding for arts and museums has attracted the headlines and will impact places like Theatre Royal Bury St Edmunds. It will also impact vulnerable elderly and children from across the county who are supported by groups like Suffolk Artslink.

Other cuts:

£11m staffing costs, initially by not replacing vacancies.

The county is taking £16m from reserves and £2.2m from risk reserve. There is a warning in the papers that the remaining £20m in risk reserve is now below the level need to provide full confidence that the council's financial risk.

The biggest cuts are in Adult and Community Services where they are proposing cutting £28m next year, £15m more than planned.

There are warnings from officers in the papers that the cuts for adult care "may result in an increase in customer complaints".

The county is also cutting all funding for skills development and apprenticeship programmes. It warns that this means it is likely that the number of young people in Suffolk not in education, employment or training will rise as a result.

The programme to decarbonise and retrofit school buildings to meet zero carbon targets is being stopped from the end of this financial year. £3.57m will have been spent on this in the current year.

Former Children's Centres, now called Family Hubs, will be "redesigned" in an unspecified way following a public consultation next financial year to save £700k.

Bus bids

A number of expressions of interest by parish councils in my Cosford division have been submitted. These include a more regular daily service between Hadleigh and Stowmarket made by Hitcham and Bildeston; Monks Eleigh PC have asked for a new demand responsive service that terminates Hadleigh and Lavenham to connect to more frequent commercial routes to Sudbury and Bury. Lavenham have asked for improvements to the 753 Sudbury to Bury service. It remains to be seen which, if any, will get funding.

Flooding in Suffolk

Recent high rainfall has led to many Suffolk residents' homes being flooded, and flooding more generally on roads. At Council on 7 December, a motion was passed for the council to review the frequency of drain and gully clearance in areas at risk of flooding, and to work closely with districts and boroughs, Anglian Water and the Environment Agency to help prevent future flooding. My group had hoped to introduce further measures on regularity of maintenance, but this was not supported by the Conservative administration. The motion that was passed was preceded by an announcement by the council of £1m in extra funding to investigate flooding incidents in the county.

Details of a government-funded scheme from DEFRA whereby Suffolk residents can apply for up to £5,000 to help protect their property from future flooding can be found at this link, with applications from January 2024: <https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/about/flood-recovery-information-for-suffolk>

SCC Carbon Net Zero Ambitions

The council's Scrutiny Committee met on Monday 11 December to review the council's progress towards becoming carbon net zero by 2030. Overall there had been a 10% reduction in emissions in 2022/23, due to reduced energy use for street lighting (a recent upgrade programme) and reduced gas consumption at SCC property and schools.

However, the council is not on target to be carbon neutral by 2030, at least partially due to indirect emissions – this includes emissions by suppliers and contractors used by the council which are difficult to measure accurately and control. The supply chain represents 91% of the council's total footprint, and it has updated its contract terms and conditions to include annual reporting on reducing carbon emissions, and also requires suppliers to sign up to its Carbon Charter and Climate Change Commercial Ask.