

Nedging PC 12.7.21 Report from County Councillor Robert Lindsay

New look County Council

I was re-elected in May along with eight other Green councillors across the county, making us the main opposition group to the ruling Conservatives and the only county in the UK that has Greens as opposition. Thanks to all those who supported me. We have decided to again join forces with the 4 LibDems and 2 independent councillors to make a 15-strong group. I am deputy leader of the group for the first year. While Greens increased from 3 to 9 the Conservatives increased from 50 to 55, so they are still overwhelmingly in control. Our larger group size means our political group will have a seat on every major committee. The first council meeting at the end of May took place at Wherstead Park outside Ipswich as apparently the only venue large enough. The next meeting in July has been cancelled and an extra meeting will instead be held in September in the hope that restrictions will have lifted and a venue can be found by then.

New cabinet

The cabinet has been reshuffled and new roles created. **Matthew Hicks** is still the leader, his deputy is now **Richard Rout** who is also member for finance and environment, combining the two roles to hopefully ensure one does not hinder the other. Highways and young people's roles have both been split into two.

Rachel Hood is cabinet member for education, SEND and skills (schools and colleges).

Beccy Hopfenspurger is member for adult care;

James Reeder is member for children and young people's services – services provided to kids outside schools

Andrew Reid has been put in charge of public health and public protection, including the fire service and CABs

Richard Smith is economic development, transport strategy – including road safety and speeding, and waste.

Paul West is in charge of operational highways (including footpaths and pavements), flooding and Ipswich

School travel and split villages and split siblings

Having been approach by both Cockfield PC and a resident of Thorpe Morieux over the issue of their siblings having to go to different schools in order to get a free bus, I have written to Rachel Hood as the relevant new cabinet member about the issue of split villages, asking if the policy could be reviewed. She has said she will talk to the senior officer

regarding this and get back to me. The other route is via the new education and health scrutiny committee, at which our group will be pushing to have a review of this policy on the agenda. It is something that the administration was warned repeatedly about by members of our political group when they were considering introducing the new policy back in 2017. The cabinet member who introduced the policy, Gordon Jones, stood down from office in May.

Special educational needs (SEND) Review

Rachel Hood's first act as education and SEND cabinet member is to order an independent review into the way parents and carers of SEND children are communicated with by Suffolk County Council. The review will not look at the actual provision of SEND services itself. A SEND team from Lincolnshire County Council has been appointed to do the job. They started week beginning June 21 and will take six weeks. The report, with any recommendations, will be published on Suffolk County Council's website. Some parents accuse the county council of breaking the law by not fulfilling legal requirements and demand a lawyer led inquiry. Suffolk County Council has refused since it says it is the role of Ofsted. Ofsted failed SCC's SEND services four years ago because of a slowness in providing needs assessments for children, and then when they are drawn up, failure to provide the actual services that they need.

Bus Back Better

Government has given Suffolk county council a series of tight deadlines over the next few months if it wants to benefit from a pot for bus funding. It must agree "enhanced partnerships" with commercial bus operators by the autumn which detail how they will invest to improve services. However, this does not appear to affect large parts of rural areas like ours where bus services are already non existent or minimal and largely dependent on dial a ride services.