

Report for Nedging PC 13.11.18

Special Educational Needs crisis

A policy development panel has been set up at which officers are pushing councillors to spend money now on new special needs schools and places in existing schools to save costs of providing SEN taxis in the future.

School admissions consultation

There are no significant changes proposed for admissions 2020/21. But the county say they are “seeking views on potential future changes to the oversubscription criteria in terms of the removal of catchment area priority, such as in favour of using a straight line distance measurement.”

If they decide to progress with this change, there would be another consultation October 2019 and any changes would then apply from 2021/22. The justifications for a change are that free schools and academies don't use catchment areas and that from 2019 free school transport will be based on nearest school not catchment. .

Newish pothole policy

In August Highways considered the prioritisation process it uses to repair potholes. Its current approach is to fix the most unsafe potholes first. “The unfortunate consequence of this is that we have to return to a particular area at a later date to repair the less severe potholes. “This is not an efficient use of resources, and is frustrating to the public.”

They are therefore going to pilot a different prioritisation approach over this coming winter, for services for West Suffolk (including our area). They say they will still take a risk based approach, but will seek to repair more defects in a single visit. If successful, it will roll out to the rest of the county. They are also looking see if they can improve the co-ordination of road closures which are requested by utility companies as well as Suffolk Highways, to stop over-runs and improve signage.

Period poverty

A Labour motion to ask the council to spend £15k to provide free tampons and towels in all maintained schools was rejected by the administration, however they did agree to the other half of the motion which was to write to the Chancellor to take VAT off sanitary products.

Renewables

Similarly a motion proposed by my political group (LibDem, Green and Independent) asking for the council to draw up a report into running a “smart grid” in Suffolk, which would allow energy from renewables to be stored in batteries, and to ensure at least 50% of all the council’s energy use will come from renewables by 2025 was also watered down, with the target taken out.

Budget overspend not quite so bad

As usual, Suffolk County Council is currently consulting on the 2019/20 budget and is asking the public to share their ideas for potential savings. The consultation runs until 5pm on Friday 16 November, and can be found at: <https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/consultations-petitions-and-elections/consultations/a-tough-call-to-make-budget-20192020/>.

A predicted overspend of £8.6m for the current financial year has dropped to £7.5m thanks to some savings but the council will probably still have to dip into reserves at the end of the year to cover the funding gap.