

A Report for Groton Council on 11th January 2023
From James Finch – County Councillor for the Stour Valley

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➤ **£500m devolution deal hands Suffolk regeneration and skills powers to level up**

A landmark devolution deal, which puts money and power over building, regeneration and skills into the hands of leaders in Suffolk was signed on 8th December 2022 by The Levelling Up Secretary of State, Michael Gove, MP and local leaders.

The deal sets out the government's plans to devolve more power to Suffolk County Council through:

- **Investment:** It will bring decades of funding worth £480 million to improve the lives of Suffolk's residents and spend on their local priorities.
- **Housing:** The deal will provide £5.8 million to regenerate brownfield land into beautiful, affordable homes and drive economic growth across the area; Suffolk will also receive greater compulsory purchase powers.
- **Education:** The agreement devolves the Adult Education Budget so they can shape provision in a way that best suits the needs of residents and the local Suffolk economy.
- **Transport:** An integrated transport settlement starting in 2024/25, to support the area to improve key transport infrastructure priorities.
- **The Environment:** The new deal will help Suffolk deliver on its ambitions to be the country's greenest county with £3 million to improve energy efficiency in homes.

This not only provides a single person who is accountable to the people of Suffolk but gives the county a local champion who can attract investment and be a stronger voice in discussions with central government. **The deal is subject to local consultation, a council resolution to change their governance model so that electors directly elect the council leader.** However elements, such as the transfer of new powers, still require parliamentary approval through secondary legislation.

The deal envisages the election of a directly elected leader for Suffolk in May 2024 subject to the passing of the relevant measures in the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill, Suffolk would call the directly elected person, the "elected leader" of the county council.

➤ **Council to protect frontline services and increase funding in '23/'24 budget proposal**

Adult care services and children's services will receive £47m more funding as part of Suffolk County Council's £685m budget proposals. Despite an incredibly challenging economic climate, the council has been able to produce a balanced budget. **This will protect the services that people rely on the most and continue to care for the most vulnerable, which accounts for 75% of the whole budget.** Adult care services will have £34m more in their budget, and children's services will have a further £13m. This will help with the extra expense needed to meet the huge increase in demands for services, as well as higher costs due to inflation.

The budget-setting has been achieved with input from the council's partners, officers, departments and notably, Suffolk residents. Over 2,600 local people contributed to an online survey and focus groups, asking where they would spend more money, spend less money, and their views on Council Tax. The top service areas where people wanted to spend more, were social care services for adults and children. **The scrutiny Committee will scrutinise the proposal on 10th January.**

This year, it's a case of being prudent across all areas of the organisation. Even though we have created £15.5m of savings, our frontline services are protected and receiving more funding. Some of the service areas where people also said they wanted to see more money spent, will receive additional funding:

- £700,000 for SEND (Special Educational Needs Services) to support new recruitment, which is on top of the £1.1m invested this year
- £110,000 for tree management: to support the 'right tree right place' policy, having an appropriate inspection regime and supporting the resulting tree management requirements.
- £45,000 for Citizens Advice: to support work during cost of living challenges.

➤ **Could you help a Ukrainian family in need? There is still more need for help**

Guests on the Homes for Ukraine scheme who are not yet ready to leave sponsorship and move into their own alternative accommodation, but who cannot stay with their current host after 6 months, can move to a new host. We are now looking for hosts for these families as well.

We also sadly continue to see more people fleeing the conflict each day. We are therefore asking anyone who thinks they may be able to help a family in need to sign up to the Homes for Ukraine scheme on the Suffolk County Council website.

➤ **Cassius wins Best Elderly Care Technology Solution Award**

Cassius also 'highly commended' at Health Tech Awards 2022 The Council's digital care technology service, Cassius, was named 'Best Elderly Care Technology Solution' at the Health Tech Digital Awards, presented by Health Tech Digital magazine in August 2022. Cassius was also 'highly commended' in the Partnership of the Year category at the Health Tech Awards 2022, presented by Health Tech Newspaper in October 2022.

Both awards recognise and celebrate the digital teams, programmes and initiatives which have made a difference throughout the year and are judged by health and care professionals from a range of backgrounds, professions, and healthcare settings.

➤ **Preparation for the 2022/2023 Winter Season**

The winter season for the gritting programme is well underway. Salt deliveries continued to be added to the Council's current stock., as of 13 December the total salt stock purchased was 24,000. Grit bin refills have begun across the county, a total of 2124 grit bins have been visited following their use in the December arctic conditions. If you need more salt please request on the Suffolk Highway reporting tool.

➤ **Suffolk archives online gallery showcasing the death of Queen Elizabeth II**

As part of Suffolk's response to the death of Queen Elizabeth II, Suffolk Archives put together an online gallery which showcased the Queen's visits to Suffolk during her 70-year reign. This was created very quickly in collaboration with RAF Honington, Archant and The National Horseracing Museum in Newmarket. The gallery was shared by the Council's Communications Team.

Suffolk Archives has also put out a call for donations of materials to add to our collections recording how Suffolk marked the momentous events of the death of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II and the proclamation of King Charles III. Whether it has programmes from proclamation events, or photographs from a community coming together to watch The Queen's funeral, these will form an important historic record for future generations.

➤ **Virtual Fostering and Adoption Sessions for the Stour Valley**

A Foster Carer Recruitment Event is held the **1st Wednesday of every month**, and an Adoption Event is on **the 1st Thursday all 7:00pm** in your home.

To book a place please email Claire.Gwatkin@suffolk.gov.uk.

My Priorities

Education - Supporting Vulnerable People - Jobs and Growth - Localism and the Stour Valley - Building on Suffolk's Strength all underpinned by strong financial management and fair council tax.