

PARISH REPORT- FEBRUARY 2024

ORWELL & VILLAGES

Cllr Mike Ninnmey recently underwent a serious operation and will be recuperating until probably the middle of March. Therefore, it will not be possible to attend all parish council meetings this month. Cllr Lee Reeves will endeavour to attend as many as possible in the interim and if parish councillors have any urgent issues that they wish to raise then please contact him by e-mail Lee.Reeves@eastsoffolk.gov.uk or leave a message on his home phone 01394 284506.

New administration at East Suffolk Council sets first Budget

East Suffolk Council will spend nearly £100million in 2024/25 delivering critical services for its communities, and projects to improve the district, as part of an ambitious four-year-plan.

At a Full Council meeting on 21st February the Council unanimously confirmed a balanced budget for the year and committed to a net spend of £46 million for services such as planning and coastal management, environmental services, leisure, waste collection and parking.

In addition, a further £50 million will be invested in assets, services, housing and infrastructure in 2024/25 as part of the General Fund and Housing Capital Programmes.

Having formed a new Administration in May 2023, the Green, Liberal Democrat and Independent Group (GLI) led by Cllr Caroline Topping, developed 'Our Direction 2028' – a four-year plan which presents the Council's key ambitions. It is driven by four main priorities (Environmental Impact, Sustainable Housing, Tackling Inequalities & Thriving Economy) and Cllr Topping believes this budget shows that the Council is making important funding decisions based on these clear principles.

"We are focusing on the inequalities that people face in East Suffolk, with a range of services dedicated to providing support for those most in need. We are raising funding for Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise (VCFSE) organisations, providing more money for Citizens Advice East Suffolk, and to Community Hubs which offer practical advice and support for a range of vulnerable residents. Improved housing is also a key priority and, along with the Housing Revenue Account, our budget commits to supporting safe, suitable and sustainable homes, delivering affordable and sustainable housing as opportunities arise.

Around 40% of East Suffolk's critical services are funded by Council Tax and the total amount paid specifically to East Suffolk by each household will increase by 2.98%. However, the Council only receives around 8.8% of each Council Tax bill, with the remainder going to Suffolk County Council, the Police and Crime Commissioner for Suffolk and Town & Parish Councils. The proportion of total Council Tax which we receive for the services we deliver remains very small. For a Band D property, the proposed increase equates to an increase of just £5.40 per household for the entire year – and yet, it will help generate a fraction under half a million pounds of additional income for East Suffolk, which will be invested into the services that matter most to our communities.

SCC budget cuts

The leaders of Suffolk's district and borough councils have written to Suffolk County Council expressing their grave concern over the proposed removal of Housing Related Support. The Housing Related Support service currently provides over 700 accommodation places, delivered through charities and specialist providers to help young people, those with learning disabilities and others at risk, to learn to live independently before they are rehoused by district and borough councils. There is currently a waiting list of around 400.

Suffolk County Council has signalled its intention to remove all funding and decommission the scheme by March 2025, despite having signed a five-year contract with support providers less than a year ago.

It is likely that the lack of supported housing for these individuals will add further pressure on both the Children & Young People Services budget and on the Adult and Community Services budgets in future years.

We recognise that finances from central government are insufficient and that difficult decisions need to be made. However, a decision to end Housing Related Support seems short-sighted and may well haunt SCC when the implications come to fruition.

Arts and Heritage budget cuts

Many will have heard that SCC had proposed the total cut of arts and heritage funding from 2025. A minor U-turn has now been made following outcry from the public. A smaller pot of money, has been allocated, as yet for 2025-2026 only, for which organisations need to compete against each other for individual projects which "meet the County council's priorities".

This is not a good situation for our museums and arts organisations which contribute so much to our residents. As many have attested, the financial security that the council's core funding provided is essential to their operation and this decision will only lead to longer term damage to Suffolk's arts and culture scene.

Ease the Squeeze help available

Are you or someone you know, worried about the increased cost of living?

We understand the pressures faced by many people today and we are working closely with key partners to ensure support is available to help ease the squeeze for households in East Suffolk. To make it as easy as possible for you to access the services and support available, locally and nationally, we have gathered information about them in one place.

www.eastsuffolk.gov.uk/community/squeeze/

If parish councillors wish to contact either of us, please feel free to do so.

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