

## **SUFFOLK COUNTY COUNCIL ANNUAL REPORT 2014**

The aim of all local authorities is closer co-operation and partnership working with other organisations and authorities, in efforts to address the funding cuts from government. As you will be aware, government grants have reduced and therefore it is necessary to change ways of working and to adopt more efficient practices. As a result, working in partnership is now seen as essential if councils are to balance their budgets; it is most welcoming to see this.

For the fourth consecutive year SCC has frozen its share of council tax. The council must save £38m over the next year which is the first part of the plan to save £156m over 4 years. However, despite being in this tough financial climate SCC will continue with its major projects such as: Raising the Bar (driving up standards in schools); roll out of superfast broadband; investing in apprenticeships; supporting the development of 10 new care homes and, you'll be pleased to hear, that the budget for fixing pot holes has been increased.

Education is SCC's no1 priority and is making every effort to raise standards through the "Raising the Bar" initiative. The recent Ofsted report was disappointing, to say the least, and identified areas for improvement. SCC had already begun improvement through Raising the Bar, which was launched last year. It encourages small rural schools, with less than 100 pupils, to enter into confederation to maximise resources. Further, SCC has been working with schools and arranging for local businesses to visit schools and inform pupils about employment opportunities in the county. A wide range of businesses have taken part such as: banks, energy companies, ports and the police.

The £1.5m investment in apprenticeships is greatly welcomed. SCC is set to invest in three programmes to encourage the growth of apprenticeships by: making apprenticeships more accessible to employers, raising the profile of apprenticeships in schools (as described) and highlighting the benefits. Young people will be offered free, impartial support to identify suitable apprenticeships and apply for vacancies.

Government has pledged £5m of new funding to help Suffolk deliver high-speed broadband to the least accessible parts of the county. At present, coverage is at 85% but with the new injection of money it is hoped that work can commence to lift that to 95%.

10 new care homes are to be built with development partner Care UK and work is already underway on 7 of the 10 new homes.

We are all only too well aware of the damage done to our roads by the excessive rain fall of the winter months and it is very good news that Suffolk is to receive £2.9m for pot hole repair. The Highways Service has a contract with Keir MG and Highways are determined that road repair will be of good quality. Unfortunately, because of the very wet weather, the materials used did not always survive. Better use of materials and labour is being introduced, so that repairs are permanent.

I began by mentioning partnerships and how vital they are to the continuance of services and improved efficiency across local authorities. Suffolk & Norfolk CC recently signed an agreement committing both counties to work closer together in areas such as: IT, commissioning of Mental Health Services and exploring areas where the two councils can join forces.

I would like to bring you up to date on my areas of activity within SCC. After the last election in May, I was asked to take on the role of Assistant Cabinet Member for Public Protection. This portfolio deals with the Fire Service, Trading Standards and Emergency Planning.

I continue to chair the Police and Crime Panel, set up by government to scrutinise and question the actions of the Police & Crime Commissioner, regarding the objectives and priorities in his Police and Crime Plan and to highlight areas of concern that have come to the Panel's notice. I have been asked to chair the forthcoming National Police and Crime Panel Conference in July in Nottingham.

I attended, together with leaders from around the Ipswich area, a Summit Meeting to discuss the A14/Orwell Bridge. The meeting was chaired by PCC Tim Passmore and concluded that a speed limit be imposed on the Orwell Bridge, that signage on A12/M25/A14 is crucial and that fast communication is vital. The efficient diversion of traffic is fundamental and needs urgent consideration. – The prospect of a Northern By-Pass is unlikely to be a reality in the near future.

I have spent my locality budget on projects as varied as: replacement cookers; bus shelter; water heater; new fencing; grit bin; village seat; equipment for village hall. I have also contributed, through my Local Highways Budget, to the Quiet Lanes project.

**PATRICIA O'BRIEN April 2014**