

SUFFOLK COUNTY COUNCIL ANNUAL REPORT 2017

The changes that began in 2015 are continuing; changes that are bringing about more effective and efficient services and an overall understanding of the future possibilities for local government. Assessment of the future is essential, in particular, in relation to our continuing need to make savings.

The Council has made savings in excess of £200ml since 2011 and is required to make further savings of £120ml up to 2020. (After 2020 there will be no grant to local councils, they will be expected to finance their services through business rate retention). The council decided to implement the 3% Nation Adult Social Care Levy and this enables the council to strengthen the care sector. SCC is committed to running a low-tax county and this we have done by freezing Council tax since in 2010.

Fortunately partnership working, which I have long supported, is starting to have an effect. This is particularly noticeable with the police and fire service and with the joint working of social care and mental health. However, I must admit to an impatience for greater involvement and recognise that, perhaps, the main reluctance to partnership is the loss of prestige/power. Organisations are unwilling to forego their prominence. But it has to happen in order for services to continue to provide.

Maintaining Suffolk's roads is a priority and SCC has invested £10ml in a programme of surface dressing that has enabled 300 miles of road to be renewed.. Pot holes are disappearing!

On the subject of highways, I continue to re-iterate my concern to SCC, The Highways Agency, police and local MPs of the need for an emergency action plan for dealing with the traffic chaos that arises when the Orwell Bridge is closed and vehicles diverted through Ipswich. It is relatively straightforward if the bridge is closed due to high winds, altho' this was not the case last November, as there should be plenty of warning. If an accident happens then there is no warning and hours of delay ensue. I recently attended a meeting with the Highways Agency and SCC Highways Management at SCC and raised the issue of allowing low sided vehicles crossing the Orwell Bridge in wind conditions that would be too strong for high sided. This is being considered.

I am pleased to report improvement in Suffolk schools. Figures published by The Department of Education confirm that Suffolk's GCSE progress has, for the first time, risen above the national average. Suffolk is now ranked in the top half of all authorities at 55th out of 151.

I chair the Police & Crime Panel that both challenges and supports the Police Commissioner. The Panel's last meeting in March focused on: partnership working, something of which the Commissioner is very concerned; protecting vulnerable people, those affected by domestic abuse, exploitation and drug use. I have one to one meetings with the Commissioner every quarter to receive an update on issues and convey any special concerns.

I have spent all my locality grant, £12,000 on such projects as: speed control sign, new playground equipment, replacement church windows, notice boards, barrier for recreation ground, posts for war memorial and much more. I have schemes on-going within my local highways budget.

Lastly, I would like to say that despite the disruption that is invariably caused by changes, SCC is a good organisation with dedicated staff and members.

Patricia O'Brien