

IKEN ANNUAL PARISH MEETING
SUFFOLK COUNTY COUNCIL REPORT 2020/21

The following report provides brief highlights of what has been a busy and tumultuous year for all, given the need to respond to the COVID19 pandemic. A more comprehensive overview is available at <https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/council-news/>. Core activities are as follows: -

WAYS OF WORKING AND PUBLIC HEALTH – From the start of Lockdown 1 in March 2020 staff like, nearly everyone worked at home in accordance with government guidance. In late April, we hosted the opening of Suffolk’s first drive-thru COVID testing site at Copdock, one of 50 sites set up by the Government. At the same time, we were meeting the challenge of supplying PPE for Care Homes and providing physical support for residents who needed to shield. We set up the “Home But Not Alone” service through the Suffolk Resilience Forum. That service remains in place today. In early July we held our first remote Full Council meeting and started to roll out services to reflect the longer term need to maintain social distancing while easing restrictions, examples of which were to reopen Household Waste Recycling Centres with an online booking system and creating safe spaces for people to shop and move about.

ADULT CARE – In November 2020, the County Council delivered the largest digital care project in its history, from procurement to delivery in just 16 weeks. The council delivered over 750 Carephone devices to elderly and vulnerable people, both in and outside of formal care settings, to help them, their families and care providers stay in touch during the coronavirus pandemic. In January this year as part of our work in supporting local care home providers and the ongoing care of residents with Dementia, we launched an exciting new initiative to develop virtual reality content, helping people recall and access positive memories that they hold dear.

FINANCE – In February this year, the Full council met and agreed the annual budget for 2021/2022. We kept the council tax rise to 3.99%, including a 2% allocation for Adult Social Care, where demand continues to rise. The total budget for this financial year is just under £600m, £40m more than last year with no cuts in services. There has been extra impact, a result of COVID19, most but not all of which has been covered by the government.

HIGHWAYS – Suffolk Highways continued to work on the roads and, a result of reduced traffic and good weather in the Spring and Summer of 2020, managed to achieve a higher rate of repairs. In late Summer, we also achieved our 2017 commitment to resurface a 1,000 mile of Suffolk’s roads. Suffolk has over 4,000 miles of roads and 5,000 miles of pavements it needs to maintain. We also started to create dedicated space for more walking and cycling using government money, an attempt to capture some of the benefits of reduced vehicle use.

CHILDRENS CARE AND EDUCATION – In October 2020, in our role for looking after children, we launched a new regional adoption agency called **Adopt East**. The purpose of this is to recruit adopters across the East of England region. In doing so both adopters and children will have a wider range of match at the earliest opportunity. The county council also continued to develop its programme of new Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) units attached to mainstream schools in the county.

INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT – In March 2020 we announced we had secured funding to explore improvements to the A12 east of Ipswich. These improvements are needed to cope with expected housing development and energy projects such as Sizewell C. We published our outline plans early this year and carried out a consultation on initial ideas which closed in late March.

In the summer of 2020 Better Broadband project achieved its 100,000th customer. It is on target to achieve coverage of 98% of premises in the county by the end of this calendar year.

In November 2020, after many years of working up the case, we finally received confirmation of Government support for building the 3rd crossing in Lowestoft, where government are providing £73m of the £125m needed. Work on the bridge started in March this year with a target completion date of Autumn 2023. This will provide a huge boost to the economy of Lowestoft and is very much welcomed.

In late February 2021, the cabinet of the county council confirmed its support for the creation of a new Freeport (Freeport East), which was subsequently confirmed in the Chancellor’s March Budget. The Freeport will cover both the ports of Felixstowe and Harwich as part of the Government’s aim to create several Freeports across the country to drive job creation and international trade, post Brexit.

CLIMATE CHANGE – Work continues with our LA partners to achieve Net Zero by 2030 and in March this year the County Council was successful in gaining over £3M of funding from The Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy to promote capital energy efficiency and heat decarbonisation projects within buildings used to provide frontline public services.

2020 COMMUNITY FUNDS – In early 2020 we set aside £3m to develop Suffolk-wide projects, including the installation of a 100 fast charging electric vehicle charging points in rural parts of the county, a programme for planting 100,000 trees and managing roadside verges for wildlife, and the development of a smartphone app alongside a range of supporting QR codes fixed to rights of way signposts located along different routes to promote walking, cycling and exploring in Suffolk’s countryside.

ENERGY PROJECTS - We have been very focussed on the major energy infrastructure projects, which are currently being assessed by the government’s Planning Inspectorate. These are the twin nuclear reactors planned at Sizewell C, delivered by EDF and the Scottish Power proposals for offshore wind power and the associated onshore transmission substations. We have worked hard to get EDF to rethink its transport proposals and aspects of environmental mitigation and believe we have made some progress. However, we remain sceptical regarding Scottish Power’s proposals to develop substations at Friston. We consider there are many aspects of the plan which are flawed including environmental impact and flooding mitigation. Overall while maintaining support in principle for wind power as an energy source, I consider Friston to be the wrong place and further efforts should be made to find a more suitable method and place of delivering power ashore.

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