

## **February 2024 County Councillor Report**

### **LOCALITY GRANT AWARD**

I have awarded £1000 from my Locality Budget to Felixstowe Men's Shed towards the purchase of a new lathe. The Men's Shed provides a service to tackle social isolation in the community.

### **ROAD MARKINGS IN TRIMLEY ST MARY**

In November a total of 16 sets of road markings in Trimley St Mary were identified as faded, and requiring repainting. This included give way markings, cycle lane markings and bus stop markings. After negotiations with County Council highways they agreed to fund the refreshing of all these road markings. I have been informed that all of this work should be completed by the middle of February.

### **FOOTPATH IN HOWLETT WAY**

The footpath leading from the brick bus shelter in Howlett Way to the High Road is badly overgrown. I have made representations to County Highways for remedial work to be undertaken. The path is barely adequate for a pedestrian to use, it would not be suitable for those with a pram, push chair or wheel chair users. I have insisted that it is adequately cut back to enable residents to safely use the path.

### **FOOTPATH IN GRAHAM ROAD FELIXSTOWE**

I am also liaising with County Highways to get an overgrown hedge cut back in Graham Road. It is currently blocking the path, forcing users onto a muddy and slippery verge.

### **COUNTY COUNCIL BUDGET FOR 2024 / 2025**

The Suffolk County Council budget has been published and will now be presented to Full Council for approval in February. There has been much publicity surrounding the County finances, and I wanted to set out the facts.

The Council is under great financial pressure with the cost of providing essential services rising faster than any growth in our income. In this financial year ( 2023/24 ) our spending on adult services has gone up 14% and on children's services by 28%. Together these two services make up 77% of our expenditure.

In planning next year's budget the administration had already identified £14 million of efficiencies and transformational changes resulting in financial savings. We have also decided to draw £15.8 million from our reserves, while leaving sufficient for emergencies and unexpected circumstances. The Cabinet have also reluctantly agreed to increase the County Council portion of Council Tax by the maximum 4.99% allowable. After all of these decisions, we still faced the need for £28.4 million of additional savings to balance the finances.

The Council has therefore taken difficult but prudent decisions to identify a total of 58 areas of savings to produce the required £28.4 million ( and £14 million already agreed ). If we had not done so, and drawn more from our reserves, the Council may have become effectively bankrupt by 2026. The savings include £0.7 million by redesigning Family Hubs ( previously known as Children's Centres ) and £1.5 million from redesigning our children in care services. Over the next two years £11 million will be saved from the staffing budget. Approximately 220 to 240 positions will be removed from the staff count, but it is anticipated that this will not involve redundancies. There has been much media attention on the removal of £0.5 million subsidies to museums and theatres. To put this into context, Suffolk County Council provides these grants to 9 organizations in Suffolk, but the subsidy makes up as little as 2% of the income for some of these. As a transitional measure, we are providing the same figure ( £0.5 million ) next year, from remaining funds that the Government gave us during the Covid pandemic, but the subsidy figure will be removed from our County Council budget.

With so much focus on savings being made, there may be a misconception that we are cutting spending. In fact the County Council budget will rise next year from £693 million to £752.7 million. We are making necessary efficiencies in order to protect and enhance the essential services to vulnerable residents and those in need of support. The amount that we will spend on Adult and Community Services and Children's Services in the next two years will rise by £74 million.

COUNCILLOR STUART BIRD B.A.(HONS)

COUNTY COUNCILLOR FOR FELIXSTOWE NORTH AND TRIMLEY DIVISION

TOWN COUNCILLOR FOR FELIXSTOWE PORT WARD