

Parish Report December 2018

Councillor

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Proposed budget cuts for 2019/20

On 22 November, the Scrutiny Committee discussed proposals for the 2019/20 budget. These will be finalised and presented to the Cabinet in January, before being debated by the full Council in February.

Council tax will increase by a total of 3.99% in 2019/20 – this will be made up of a 2.99% increase in general council tax and a final 1% increase for the Social Care Precept.

The proposed “tactical savings” total £11.2m. These are spread across the Council’s directorates (as shown in the table below), with Growth, Highways and Infrastructure, Adult and Community Services, and Health, Wellbeing and Children’s Services seeing the greatest cuts.

Table 8: Summary of Savings Proposals

	Adult & Community Services (ACS) £'m	Health, Wellbeing & Children's Services (HW&CS) £'m	Fire & Rescue Service and Public Safety £'m	Growth, Highways and Infrastructure £'m	Corporate Services & Central Resources £'m	TOTAL £'m
Cost reduction	1.0	0.2	0.0	2.0	0.1	3.3
Grant reduction			0.4			0.4
Maximise Income		1.4	0.0	0.0	0.3	1.7
Service reduction	1.0	0.1		1.7	0.0	2.8
Staffing reduction	0.1	0.9	0.3	0.5	1.2	3.0
TOTAL	2.1	2.6	0.7	4.2	1.6	11.2

The proposals for tactical savings include:

- Remove the full Citizens Advice Grant – however the Council have since announced that this will be phased in rather than immediate, with 50% of the grant being cut this year and the remaining 50% being cut in the 2020/21 budget
- Staffing reduction (totalling £3m) across all directorates
- Reduce Housing Related Support and the provision of hostel beds
- Negotiate care pricing
- Stop displaying bus timetables at the roadside
- Reduce spend on sponsored bus services
- Reduce out-of-hours stand-by service and winter support fleet for Suffolk Highways
- Stop road sign cleaning and only maintain mandatory road markings
- Turn more streetlights off overnight
- Cease accreditation of the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme (the scheme will continue, however organisations will license themselves directly with the charity rather than through SCC)

Unfortunately, I have not been informed of the savings associated with each of the above proposals, and instead have only been told how much each directorate is expected to save in total. The final proposals, along with the savings associated with each of them, will not be made available until January.

U-turn on support for period poverty

In October, a motion asking for a commitment of £15,000 in the budget to help tackle “period poverty” was unfortunately rejected by the Council.

However, the administration have since announced that they will be undertaking an audit of the services in Suffolk that are aimed at tackling period poverty, to identify gaps and assess how provision can be improved.

I am cautiously hopeful that this review will result in proper support and funding for those amazing voluntary organisations that are currently providing free sanitary products. They cannot provide that service all on their own, and a commitment of funding from Suffolk County Council will be vital to ensure we eradicate period poverty across the whole county.

Decision on Upper Orwell Crossings delayed

Work on the Upper Orwell Crossings in Ipswich has been suspended since August 2018, due to concerns that the costs of the project were no longer sustainable.

In October, the administration announced that they would need an additional £43m of funding in order to continue with the project. It was agreed by Cabinet that officers and councillors would have until December to try and find this additional funding.

However, this deadline has now been pushed back to January 2019. We are therefore expecting an announcement in the new year about the future of the project.

Significant increase in insurance pay-outs for cars damaged by potholes

Data published under Freedom of Information laws has shown that, between 1 January and 16 October this year, Suffolk Highways have already paid out £67,819.07 for vehicle damage (including insurance pay outs, costs and legal fees). This is a significant increase from the previous year, when pay-outs for the whole of 2017 totalled £26,004.63.

The number of claims has also more than doubled, from 598 in 2017 to 1,265 so far in 2018.

Wishing all Councillors Clerks etc a very Happy Christmas & New Year

Andrew Stringer