

Parish Report – March 2020

Councillor

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Review of school transport policy implementation highlights 19 failings

Suffolk County Council has undertaken an internal review of the implementation of its new school transport policy. The report from the review group identified nineteen failings and was discussed by the Scrutiny Committee on 12 February.

The report highlighted a number of concerns, including: the policy was implemented at the same time as a new IT system and staff restructure; there were insufficient staff numbers to cope with the increased workload; the policy was poorly communicated to parents and schools; the application and appeals processes were too complex; and the wellbeing of parents and children suffered as a result of the poor implementation.

The Scrutiny Committee has agreed to review the policy itself before the end of 2020.

2020-21 budget agreed

On 13 February, the Council agreed the budget for 2020-21. This included a council tax rise of 3.98%, a £3m "Suffolk 2020 Fund", and a £0.5m Highways Investment Fund.

Both opposition groups proposed amendments to the budget. Our amendment included additional funding for health visitors, increasing social worker salaries, investment in electric vehicle charging infrastructure and increasing funding to Citizens Advice. Unfortunately, these amendments were voted down by the Conservative administration.

Plans for Ipswich Northern Route are scrapped

The Cabinet at Suffolk County Council has officially voted to end any further work into an Ipswich Northern Route. This decision follows the withdrawal of support for the Northern Route from a number of district councils.

The Cabinet has instead agreed to set-up a taskforce to look at alternative measures for dealing with transport issues in Ipswich. It is not yet clear who will be on the taskforce, when it will be set up or what its remit will be.

Streetlights to change to LED in bid to save money and carbon

The Cabinet has agreed to invest £9.8m into converting all council-owned streetlights in Suffolk to LED bulbs, with the capability for dimming by up to 50%.

This level of investment could potentially be returned through energy savings within 5.5 years of completed conversion, if no dimming was applied and assuming energy costs increase at a rate of 8%. If dimming is applied, there would be a return on investment within 4 years.

It is also expected to reduce carbon emissions by between 60-80%.

The council is hoping to begin the work in autumn 2020, and expects the project to be completed within two years.