



County Councillor Jessica Fleming

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Firstly, thank you everyone for your support this year, please get in touch with your comments, ideas and suggestions which are always most welcome.

The past year has been dominated by the unusual autumn and winter storm events, the council's response to them, and the council budget's. Budget pressures have arisen mainly from wage inflation/ living wage increase, high interest rates and increased demand particularly in adult social care (ACS) and childrens' services.

The Revenue Budget for 2024/5 totals £753 million (up £53m from 2023/4), this has been balanced through a one-off injection of £16m from the corporate risk reserve. However our Chief Financial (Section 151) Officer has made it clear that future years will not have equivalent capacity to draw from reserves. In response council tax has been raised by the limit of 4.99% of which 2% is ring fenced for social care. Overall the financial position is sound though challenging and additional savings proposals must be planned to enable the council to remain solvent going forward.

Prior to setting the budget, the council conducted a public survey to assess opinion on spending priorities and conducted 3 focus groups. Comments supported funding for (in priority order from survey): Highways & Infrastructure; Children and Young People; Public Health & Communities; Adult Social Care. Comments tended not to support further council tax increases at least on lower bands. Rather, future budgets should focus on efficiencies, salaries in higher pay categories, better partnership working such as health service, and innovation.

The council is responsible for an array of services including Registrars, Coroners, Libraries, Museums and Archives, Asylum Seekers referred by the Home Office, Community Safety, Fire & Rescue Services, Trading Standards as well as Roads, Waste Disposal, Adult Social Care, Childrens Services including Special Needs and Disabilities (SEND), School Transport, Public Health. More information on these services and partner organisations can be found on the web platform www.suffolk.gov.uk

- **Storms and Flooding** – As lead local flood authority, the county council has a duty to investigate 'significant' flooding under Section 19 of the Flood and Water Management Act. These investigations help to establish the source of flooding, factors which may have caused or exacerbated the flooding, the impacts on people, services and infrastructure. Usually around 4 Section 19 events occur annually, this year there were at least 100.

The scale of work undertaken since the storm includes: Clearing and jetting over 8,000 drains, Repairing 1,200 road defects, Contacting landowners about blocked watercourses, Investing £10 million into drain and gully clearance, Hired (7) new engineers to address

urgent flood problems, Gathered over 800 flood reports from homes and businesses, Helped access funding from the Government relating to Storm Babet. Work is ongoing..

- **Supporting SEND** – Along with its NHS partners, the council was jointly inspected by Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) last November which found significant concerns with the SEND service delivery by the NHS and Council. (This was the first joint inspection.) As a result changes have been made, a Shadow Improvement Board set up with membership from both SCC and its NHS partners and a new approach developed that incorporates stronger joint working arrangements. The council has invested additional funds to secure essential specialist staff and is committed to improving all aspects of the service.
- **Adult & Social Care** – Following a period of intense inspection by the Care Quality Commission (CQC), Suffolk County Council has become one of the first councils nationwide to achieve a ‘Good’ standard. Earlier in 2023 CQC announced that 5 local authorities including Suffolk were invited to be part of a Local Authority Assessment Pilot to help develop the new model of inspection against the requirements of the Care Act.
- **Devolution** – The Government is seeking views on in principle devolution arrangements that would include:
 - A directly elected leader of Suffolk County Council
 - Control of a new investment fund worth £480m over the next thirty years
 - Local control of the Adult Education Budget each year (worth £9.4m in 2025/26)
 - £5.8m one-off funding to prepare brownfield sites for development
 - Multi-year transport funding plus £500,000 over two years to finalise Suffolk’s Local Transport Plan.

A 10-week public consultation on our proposed devolution deal with the Government will start on 18th March and run through until 26th May. The consultation is in two main parts – an open survey, hosted by Suffolk County Council, that any residents can complete and a sample survey of 1000 Suffolk residents conducted independently by Ipsos Mori - www.suffolk.gov.uk/devolution and social media. The question will be debated later this summer at Full Council.

- **Bus Service Improvements** – The council will receive £3.6 million of Government funding over the next two years on strengthening and expanding Suffolk’s bus network from the Department for Transport’s Bus Service Improvement Fund Phase 2 to deliver improvements to public transport in Suffolk. Suffolk’s Enhanced Partnership, which represents the county council and local bus operators, has agreed to allocate £1.2 million to support operator - and local community-led proposals for new or enhanced services across the county.
- **Suffolk’s Local Transport Plan** - The plan sets out a long-term vision for transport in Suffolk until 2040 . Feedback is currently being sought on key themes proposed for the fourth version of the plan. A link to the survey can be found at <https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/ltp4>. The consultation runs until 8 April 2024, however late submittals may be accepted.
- **Highways Contract** - Milestone Infrastructure, part of M Group Services commenced its new contract on 1 October 2023. Milestone is the Council’s new contract partner for up to 20 years under a contract to provide projects including but not limited to maintaining roads,

pavements and rights of way, drainage, hedge trimming, construction of new road schemes, snow-clearing and gritting.

- **Nationally Significant Infrastructure and large-scale energy Projects in Suffolk** - Energy developers are bringing forward large-scale energy projects following the latest publication of National Grid's Transmission Entry Capacity (TEC) Register. The TEC Register is a list of projects (usually NSIPs) that have secured the right to connect to National Grid's network if consented under the Planning Act 2008 by government, not local councils. These connection offers form a legally binding contract with National Grid. The current list of connection offers shows that new projects connections are possible at at Bramford near Ipswich, and at Yaxley, near Eye, in north Suffolk. These projects include large-scale solar panel and battery storage proposals in the same style as the recent SUNNICA scheme in West Suffolk, which is a proposal to create a 2500-acre Solar Farm on the Suffolk Cambridgeshire border.
- **Norwich to Tilbury Pylon Scheme** - The [ESO East Anglia Network Study](#), published on 12 March 2024 by The National Grid Electricity System Operator, was set up to explore other ways to connect and transmit energy from offshore wind in Norfolk, Suffolk, and Essex. Options identified by ESO offer alternatives to the Norwich to Tilbury onshore line including offshore and hybrid schemes with coastal land links. Implications of the ESO study are as yet uncertain and under review.

For current information from National Grid refer to:

<https://www.nationalgrid.com/electricity-transmission/network-and-infrastructure/infrastructure-projects/norwich-to-tilbury>

- **Sizewell C** - Construction 'began' on 15th January 2024 under the terms of its Development Consent Order for the twin 3.2GW nuclear power stations. The council obtained significant improvements to plans during the project's examination by the Planning Inspectorate, including maximising transport of construction materials by rail and sea rather than by road. For more information refer to [Suffolk County Council's role in Sizewell C](#) . During construction the council will have a number of responsibilities:
 - Oversight of discharge requirements (equivalent to planning conditions) to maintain control over highways, archaeology and flooding
 - Project governance including chairing the Transport Review Group
 - Administering a portion of funding negotiated during the examination and secured through a Deed of Obligation (a legal agreement between Sizewell C, Suffolk County Council and East Suffolk Council for the scheme to limit its impact on local communities during construction).