

Parish Report April 2018

Councillor

Andrew Stringer (Upper Gipping)

'Robin'
Blacksmith Road
Cotton, Stowmarket
IP14 4QN

07545423842

andrew.stringer@suffolk.gov.uk

Councillors denied the chance to debate final school transport proposals

On 22 March, the Conservative majority at Suffolk County Council voted against a motion that would have allowed all councillors the chance to debate and vote on the final school transport proposals, before the Cabinet makes a decision in June.

The cross-party motion, proposed by Labour and seconded by the Liberal Democrat, Green and Independent Group, called for an extraordinary Council meeting to debate and hold a non-binding vote on the final proposals. This would have given councillors who represent the most affected areas, from across the political spectrum, the chance to have their say and raise their concerns.

I am deeply disappointed that this motion did not receive the support of the council. It is very strange that Conservative councillors have denied themselves the opportunity to fully represent those who elected them. From the very beginning, the Liberal Democrat, Green and Independent Group have fought against these proposals. We are deeply concerned that a change in school transport policy will not achieve any significant savings, whilst causing untold harm to rural educational outcomes.

New Chief Executive announced

Suffolk County Council has appointed a new chief executive, Nicola Beach, following a unanimous recommendation by the authority's Staff Appointments Committee and decision by the full council. Nicola, who is currently executive director of infrastructure and environment at Essex County Council, will join SCC this summer. Sue Cook will continue in her role as Interim Chief Executive until this time, when she will return to her role as corporate director of health, wellbeing and children's services.

Respublica commissioned to examine options for public sector reform in Suffolk

Cllr Noble, Leader of Suffolk County Council, announced that he has commissioned Respublica to look at public sector reform in Suffolk. The think-tank will examine the current arrangements for public service delivery in Suffolk and will report back on the merits of making a bid to the government for a reformed system.

The review will look once again at the possibility of a unitary county council in Suffolk. However, Cllr Noble has also insisted that other options will be considered, such as East and West Suffolk unitaries, an option including a Greater Ipswich unitary council, or enhancing the existing two-tier system.

County and district/borough councillors were not consulted, and the announcement has not been well-received by the leaders of Ipswich Borough Council and Waveney District Council. The review is expected to cost £68,000.

Potholes – funding boost and rise in insurance claims

Potholes continue to be a key issue for councillors and residents alike. There are two significant updates this month:

Suffolk County Council receives cash boost to deal with potholes

Following the bad weather in February and March, Suffolk County Council has received £2.5m of additional funding from the Government to help with road repairs.

Suffolk Highways are encouraging residents to report potholes using the reporting tool (available at highwaysreporting.suffolk.gov.uk) and have already received over 11,000 reports in 2018. However, concerns have been raised by some councillors and residents who have been informed by the online tool that a pothole has been repaired, when in fact the work has not been carried out. If you experience this, please let me know so that I can inform the Cabinet Member for Highways of the problem.

Rise in insurance claims against Suffolk County Council

Insurance claims against Suffolk County Council due to “carriageway surface defects”, such as potholes, have risen in recent years, from 363 in 2013 to 647 in 2017. A total of 2239 claims were made in this five-year period, but 84.7% of these were successfully defended by the council. Despite this, between 2013 and 2017, Suffolk County Council paid out £226,432 in compensation and legal fees.

Suffolk County Council’s gender pay gap remains significant

Suffolk County Council’s pay report revealed that, although the Council employs nearly three times as many women as men, there is still a significant gender pay gap in favour of men.

The County Council’s mean gender pay gap is 14.8%, whilst the median pay gap is 18.6%. In other words, although Suffolk County Council employs relatively few men, they are overrepresented in the better paid sectors and underrepresented in the less well-paid sectors. All the statistics refer to the average hourly pay rates of employees.

Suffolk Waste Partnership awarded £10,000

The Suffolk Waste Partnership has been awarded £10,000 from the Government’s Litter Innovation Fund, to run innovative local projects aimed at reducing litter.

The SWP plans to use the funding to:

- Trial new style litter bins at key layby locations and improve labelling and signage of litter bins along the A11, A12 and A14 in Suffolk.
- Trial new remote monitoring technology to help councils coordinate litter bin emptying more efficiently and effectively.
- Ensure that any person taken to court and convicted for a littering offence anywhere in Suffolk is named and shamed publicly.
- Run an awareness campaign to remind residents and visitors alike about the issues and the consequences of littering.
- Educate residents and businesses about how to prevent their waste inadvertently escaping their control and ending up as litter.