

SUFFOLK COUNTY COUNCIL ANNUAL REPORT 2012/13

We are all aware that the economic situation is serious and so local government, along with everyone else, has to take tough, but necessary decisions, in order to deliver services. We have made efficiency savings in re-organisation, the way in which we deliver services and, most importantly, by working with other authorities. Government grants have reduced, and will continue to do so; thus changes to the way services are delivered is inevitable. More services will be provided by outside bodies but with the council remaining in the background to ensure ease of transfer and stability. However, despite the above Suffolk CC is wedded to growth and opportunity, within the county, as you will see later in my report.

There will be no increase in **council tax** this year. This is the third consecutive year that the county council has frozen its share of council tax.

Alongside the freeze in council tax, the council voted through a budget for the next 12 months that will achieve savings of £25million – the second part of a plan to save £50million over two years. The savings will be achieved by reducing management and back-office costs, cutting bureaucracy and working in new, innovative and more efficient ways.

During this year's budget debate Mark Bee, Leader of SCC, announced that the number one Conservative pledge at the forthcoming county elections would be a four-year freeze in council tax.

Responsibility for the day-to-day running of the **county's library services** was transferred to Industrial and Provident Society (IPS) at the beginning of August last year. All Suffolk's 44 libraries, mobile, school and prison library services now come under the direct control of the IPS – a first in the country – which works in partnership with local library groups to support and expand the service.

Schools in the Haverhill and Lowestoft area, that were in the first phase of the move from 3 to 2 tier under the **Schools Organisation Review**, have shown early signs of improvement (in writing 12%, maths 6%) as shown in the SATS results. In its drive to lift educational standards SCC has launched '**Raising the Bar**' an ambitious project involving secondary school head teachers, colleges and business leaders, who aim to raise the attainment and employability of young people in Suffolk. At present, there are 1,600 young people aged between 16 and 18 who are not involved in any form of education, training or work, while over 4,000 18-24 year-olds are unemployed. Meanwhile new and emerging industries are creating a demand for new technical skills, on top of a strong foundation of academic achievement. Therefore, it is timely that 'Raising the Bar' will aim to develop a collective understanding of the key priorities for Suffolk's youth.

Proposals developed with Care UK will see SCC's existing 16 council run **residential homes** replaced by ten new homes benefiting from the latest in design and technology and with the opportunity to increase the number of specialist dementia beds. (The 16 existing council-run homes were built up to 50 years ago, and the cost to the county council of bringing these up to modern standards would simply be prohibitive).

The county council has been working with borough, district councils and local businesses to produce the **Suffolk Growth Strategy** a strategy designed to create an environment in which the private sector can develop economic growth and jobs within a detailed delivery timetable.. At the same time, a new, official, '**Invest in Suffolk**' website was launched – an easily-accessible site for businesses looking to invest in the county – www.investinsuffolk.com. A new '**Inward Investment**

Service' – made up of a team of professionals to provide a single point of contact for investors has been announced.

At a special meeting of the cabinet in September, it was stated that the county council would be working in partnership with BT to deliver the **Better Broadband for Suffolk** programme. By 2015, 9 out of 10 Suffolk properties will be connected to fibre-based broadband, with speeds of at least 10Mbps.

In May last year, the official construction of an energy-from-waste facility for Suffolk began. The site will open in December 2014, diverting 252,000 tonnes of **waste** a year from environmentally-damaging landfill sites. The waste will be used to create enough electricity for 30,000 homes.

In September I was elected Chairman of the **Police and Crime Scrutiny Panel**. It comprises of 7 district councillors, 4 county councillors and 2 independent members. Our remit is to challenge and support the Police and Crime Commissioner, Tim Passmore. Process, governance and rules and regulations inevitably required our early scrutiny. However, we have commented on the draft Police and Crime Plan, which sets out the objectives and priorities for the Commissioner, the precept and agreed the appointment of the new Chief Constable, Douglas Paxton..

I have spent my **locality budget** on such projects as: grit bins, Christmas lights, jubilee mugs, tree felling, tree planting, tree survey, solar panels, soakaways, loo refurbishment, village hall heating system.

I am standing for re-election in the forthcoming county elections on May 2nd.

PATRICIA O'BRIEN

April 22013