

## **SUFFOLK COUNTY COUNCIL ANNUAL REPORT 2015**

For the 5<sup>th</sup> year Suffolk County Council's council tax share is to be frozen. Suffolk residents will not pay more than they did in 2010/11. The council has managed, successfully, to deliver savings in excess of £130m over the last four years. However, as the government's deficit reduction programme is set to continue until 2018/19, there is a forecast of a further £120m budget shortfall that will need to be addressed over the next three years. The Council tax freeze was agreed as part of the budget proposals for 2015/16, which include savings of £38.2million, to be made across services during the financial year. The bulk of these savings (£24.6m) will be delivered through wide-ranging transformation programmes which will result in the council becoming a leaner and more focused organisation. The remaining savings will be made by: reducing previous contingency budgets, set aside for major projects; change management; budgetary savings from within service areas. Meanwhile, over the last five years, there has been a reduction of approx. 47% in the workforce.

I am stating the obvious when I say that our children are our future. It is therefore, with a measure of some satisfaction, that I note there is an improvement in education attainment in Suffolk. Suffolk has risen 12 places in the national league table for GCSE results since 2013; from 137<sup>th</sup> to 125<sup>th</sup> out of 151 local authorities. Whilst this does not generate flag waving it shows an upward trend. In 2012, Suffolk had fallen 8.9% behind the national average at GCSE. This prompted the Raising the Bar programme. Although improvement has been slow the gap between Suffolk and the national average has narrowed. The 2014 results now show the margin to be 1.7%.

There have been improvements for Early Years and Key Stage 1 in literacy, writing, maths and reading. All risen in the national ranking.

As a former Cabinet Member for Children's Services I take particular interest in Suffolk education and wish for greater, speedier progress.

An Initiative to drive employment opportunities was launched by SCC and New Anglia LEP in February. Employers across Suffolk are being urged to create new apprenticeships. £1.5million has been put into the campaign to double the number of apprentices to 5,000 by 2019. Increasing the number of apprenticeships will play a vital part in tackling the skills shortage in Suffolk.

As I mentioned in my annual report last year, the aim, indeed the necessity of organisations, such as county, district, health, police, fire and ambulance, to work in partnership is essential for services to be delivered. I will identify much of the good work that is taking place and the continued efforts to strive for closer/integrated working.

One of the most successful partnerships is between the 'blue light services'. Four fire stations across Suffolk in Ixworth, Elmswell, Debenham and Framlingham are shared with the police service; ambulance crews in Lowestoft and Brandon are now based at fire stations.

The government has awarded a grant of £4.94million to help increase the number of shared bases for fire, police and ambulance. Not only does this cement partnership working, but it will deliver financial savings for all the parties.

Suffolk's energy-from-waste site at Great Blakenham is now open and a recent agreement between Suffolk and Norfolk will see 40,000 tonnes of Norfolk's residual household waste used to generate electricity. Both councils will benefit with savings of £1 million over the period of the deal. During construction, over 100 Suffolk firms won contracts to supply goods and services to the site. It has created 47 new jobs on site and a further 200 could be produced if the proposed greenhouse project goes ahead.

Suffolk's Hate Crime Service and partnership organisations have launched Stay Safe badges to support vulnerable adults. The Stay Safe Scheme was developed to enable vulnerable people to

feel safer by providing them with places they can go, should they need help or support .Businesses involved include libraries, leisure centres, shops, restaurants, banks and pubs. Suffolk Police have supported Stay Safe by producing Stay Safe cards, stickers and in funding the Stay Safe badge.

Engaging with partners is often slow but I hope that I have shown, with the above, that collaboration is gaining momentum. SCC departments are finding new initiatives and more efficient ways of working across organisations.

The Suffolk Police and Crime Panel, that I chair, meet quarterly with Tim Passmore, The Police & Crime Commissioner. We scrutinise and debate issues such as: finance, responding to emergencies; solving crime; preventing and reducing crime and caring for the victims of crime. There are particular areas that have recently gained public recognition and momentum. Domestic violence and child exploitation have come under considerable scrutiny and the PCC has made those his top priorities. I have frank and open informal discussion with the Commissioner on a regular basis and he is extremely keen to further partnership working as he regards it as vital to the future delivery of service. I chaired the First National Conference of Police & Crime Panels in Nottingham, earlier in the year.

I have been continually interested in developments to deal with problems on the Orwell Bridge. I recently wrote a letter to MP Therese Coffey stating I believed that the speed limit on the Orwell Bridge should be 50mph and, indeed, that lorries should be confined to the inside lane of the A14 ( and other major roads) and restricted to 50mph.

Finally, I have spent my locality money on projects such as: parish newsletters; road cones; replacement of fencing; picnic benches; village hall repairs.

**PATRICIA O'BRIEN April 2015**