

September 2023 report for the Martlesham Division

Awards for care workers who saved centenarian from international scam

A Suffolk care worker and her boss who saved a 101-year-old woman from an international scam that saw her fleeced of nearly £50,000 are being formally recognised.

Sally Mills and Paul Watts are to receive Certificates of Merit from Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service for stepping in when they realised the vulnerable woman was being targeted by heartless hoaxers in Austria.

They were conning the woman through a clairvoyant scam, where people pose as spiritual guides offering insights into a person's life and the future.

They typically target the elderly and lonely via mass mailshot letters, often using an image of someone who looks trustworthy to pose as a clairvoyant.

In this case it was British actress and model Carol-Anne Goodman, who had no idea her image was being used, and who is backing the Trading Standards campaign to crackdown on the scammers.

Sally is a community support worker for Caring Moments Ltd, a domiciliary care provider based in Lowestoft which cares for 60 users around the Waveney valley area.

She was assigned to care for the woman and became suspicious when on one visit the victim handed her some post to send and when she returned to her car £45 in cash fell out from a pre-paid envelope.

Paul had attended training given by Suffolk Trading Standards officer Lesley Crompton and recognised the victim was sending money to clairvoyant scammers.

Lesley worked with the team at Caring Moments to put support and prevention in place to prevent the victim sending any further money, and they have helped provide statements for an international investigation. It is estimated that the victim has sent over £48,000 over several years.

The victim, who has since celebrated her 103rd birthday, now has means to sort her mail, and every letter that she thinks might be a scam is placed in a box for the care team to check when they visit.

Paul said:

"Sally came to me as soon as she became concerned, and based on the training I had received I gave the Trading Standards team a call.

"We don't see this sort of thing very often as most of our service users have family nearby who can keep an eye out for things like this, but this lady's family live miles away so she was looking after her own post.

"Hopefully this case will open the eyes of those who have, or look after, elderly and vulnerable people and what to do when they spot it."

Sally has since appeared on ITV's This Morning show to help highlight the ongoing investigation into clairvoyant scams that is being coordinated by the National Trading Standards Scam Team.

In August, Suffolk Trading Standards presented Sally and Paul with flowers and 'Suffolk Says Thanks' badges for their intervention.

The teams also nominated them for a Certificate of Merit at the Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service Awards, which they will be collecting at the ceremony on September 27.

Suffolk Trading Standards encourages people to join the fight against scammers by signing up to become a Trading Standards Champion.

For more details go to the Trading Standards website at www.suffolk.gov.uk/JoinTheFight

Inflation, SEND school transport and care costs contribute to council's predicted overspend

Inflation, school transport for children with SEND, and looking after children in care are the main factors for SCC forecasting to spend £22.3m over its £688.1m budget for this year.

This is a similar story for many councils across the country, due to higher demand for their services, inflation remaining higher than expected for longer, and interest rates rising to levels not forecast by financial markets.

[Recent research by the County Councils Network](#) suggests that England's largest councils will need to make at least £1bn in savings to balance their current 2023/24 budgets.

A [BBC investigation](#) also reported that councils expect to be £5.2bn short of balancing budgets by April 2026, the average council facing a £33m predicted deficit by 2025-26.

Suffolk County Council projects a 4% overspend (£29.3m), to be partially offset by an additional Section 31 grant from Government, and additional income from the pooling of business rates with the district and borough councils in Suffolk, totalling £7m.

Details of the main areas of overspend are:

- **School transport** - forecast to overspend by £11.4m (39% of the overspend), with £8.3m of this being travel costs for children with special education needs and disabilities (SEND). This is largely due to more children with SEND needs, transport operators being in limited supply, and rising costs from those operators who are also feeling the impacts of inflation, especially fuel costs.
- **Children in care** - forecast to overspend by £8.2m (28% of the overspend). The council has a responsibility to provide care for children and young people under the age of 18. Some of these have incredibly complex needs requiring 24-hour care from multiple carers. There is currently an unexpectedly higher number of children requiring this support, with this costing an average of £22,700 per week, per child.
- **Adult care services** - forecast to overspend by £3.5m (12% of the overspend) for purchasing care, due to increases in demand, and staffing costs in the sector. The fees paid for residential and nursing placements remain high with 64% of new residential and nursing

packages being above the published rate of £806 per week, with some specialist packages being over £1,500 per week.

- **Inflation** - inflation and interest rates have been higher than experienced in a generation, with the legacy of COVID-19 continuing to have a significant impact on various services. As an example, there is an estimated £3.0m (10% of the overspend) pressure as pay settlements continue to be above historical norms as inflation has remained stubbornly high during 2023 so far. High interest rates mean it has been more costly than anticipated to borrow money, which the council does to help fund big projects, such as upgrading highways, maintaining schools or developing household recycling centres.

In addition to the net overspend of £22.3m from this main budget, the council is forecasting an overspend of £15.8m against its £256.5m budget from the Dedicated Schools Grant and Pupil Premium Grant. This is money from Government specifically to fund schools and services for pupils. This overspend comes solely from resources spent on Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) provision, not including school transport. Suffolk, like many other local authorities, is seeing a continuous increase in demand which is not being met by the same level of increase in funding.

Despite these challenges, council departments continue to make savings. This year's budget identified £25.1m of savings to be made, and the latest figures show that £20m of this is projected to be achieved.

The Cabinet at Suffolk County Council will discuss the Q1 2023-24 Revenue Budget paper, at its meeting on 12 September 2023. [Cabinet papers are published on the Suffolk County Council website.](#)

Councils unite against National Grid pylon proposals

In a [joint letter to National Grid](#), the leaders of the three councils address the extensive impact on landscapes and local communities that the scheme would bring.

They also highlight that an offshore solution has not been sufficiently investigated, and the opportunities that this could bring to co-ordinate with other large-scale energy projects off the region's coast.

The Norwich to Tilbury project would see 114 miles of electricity pylons weave their way through the three counties. Only a small percentage of this cabling would go underground, an issue which the councils also raise, stating that more would be needed particularly in the Dedham Vale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and near Diss and the Waveney Valley.

National Grid held a second, non-statutory consultation, which closed on 21 August 2023. It is expected that a statutory consultation will take place in 2024.