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Suffolk County Council Report
October 2023

Dear All,

Please see below for your information.

Kind regards
Bobby

New and independent fire control centre gives the best deal for Suffolk

A new fire control centre fitted with state-of-the-art communications for mobilising and managing Suffolk's firefighters would be in the best interests of the county, a report to councillors says.

Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) announced in June it would be withdrawing from the shared control room arrangement in place since 2011 with Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Fire and Rescue Service, based in Huntingdon.

The report recommending approval to Suffolk County Council's Cabinet, due to sit on Tuesday September 12, says fire control would now be brought back into the county by the end of 2024.

The report says the move is necessary because a project to replace the current mobilising technology agreed by both services in 2019, is currently two years overdue.

In addition, the French company providing the new technology entered "Redressment Judiciaire" a form of financial administration which resulted in the freezing of its assets and liabilities. If the company comes out of administration, it will remain with its liabilities to pay.

SFRS concluded the non-delivery and missed milestones by the new technology provider, together with its financial predicament, means continuing with the current IT mobilising project presents an unacceptable risk to firefighters and the public.

This risk should be mitigated as soon as possible by Suffolk having its own control room using tried and tested systems.

However, the current system continues to mobilise the emergency response effectively, keeping Suffolk

An initial capital investment of £1.588m would be required for project delivery over three years. Additional revenue service of £1.615m annually will need to be provided to support the operating cost of the control room.

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 discussed 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.

Powerful fostering film 'Any Of Us' launched

Suffolk County Council is excited to announce the launch of "Any Of Us," a compelling fostering film that sends a universal message that anyone with the capacity to care can become a foster carer.

The film spotlights three normal people demonstrating the caring qualities essential to becoming a foster carer. Their stories intertwine with Chloe's journey into fostering, creating the narrative that any of us can foster.

Fostering with your council or children's trust means supporting your community by offering safe,

The film has been produced by Reel TwentyFive and project managed by CAN Digital/Rachel Brown. This is the sixth film produced by a growing partnership of councils and children's trusts to promote local authority fostering.

The national launch took place at Birmingham's Everyman cinema on 26 September 26.

If you are interested in becoming a foster carer request your free foster carer pack and find out about the training, support and allowances you'll receive:

[Visit the foster page](#)

Call us: 01473 264800

Email us: fosterandadopt@suffolk.gov.uk

Exciting new chapter comes with allergy danger for young people

A column by Councillor Andrew Reid, Suffolk County Council Cabinet Member for Public Health and Public Protection.

For many young people this is the time of year when they are about to begin the exciting new chapter in their lives as they go to university or college.

Leaving home for the first time, they will be mixing and living with new people of their own age and rightly enjoying all the fun and opportunity this brings.

However, for those suffering from food allergies this can bring new challenges and I would encourage parents to talk to their children about it.

Those aged between 16 and 24 are in the most at-risk category when it comes to allergies, so please do encourage your young person to talk to their friends and housemates, to make them aware of their situation and how to spot an allergic reaction.

Most people will already know someone with an allergy and be able to support. However, occasionally housemates are just not able to understand the seriousness of the allergy and it may be wise to speak with the university or college welfare officer to seek alternative accommodation if the allergy relates to their environment.

Also, encourage them to carry wipes and clean down surfaces, to reduce the risk of cross contamination before eating or studying around campus.

When eating out, if it is a planned occasion, suggest they look at online menus in advance if available and use social media to find recommendations for suitable places to eat out with allergies.

In Suffolk, we regularly get complaints about allergens - 14 different allergen types must be declared in law – and while people focus on nut allergies many others are just as deadly to relevant people. Allergies are increasing and are therefore more important today.

Locally, we took just over 230 food samples last year, around half of which were tested for the presence of undeclared allergens.

Of those, approximately 25% of samples were unsatisfactory in that they were either labelled incorrectly, not declaring the correct allergens or if a meal contained an undeclared allergen.

Samples are taken either because of complaints, or due to our local knowledge/intelligence of the product/premises type.

Last year we had more than 100 complaints about specific food businesses of which three quarters were complaints about allergens.

In terms of the main product type tested in Suffolk:

- Vegan chocolate – 12 samples were taken of chocolate described as ‘vegan’ – nine of which contained traces of milk. Whilst some did contain a precautionary allergen label e.g., ‘May contain milk’ – consumers may not notice this and instead rely on the name of the food and, if they are allergic to dairy, this could be an issue.
- Take-away coffee – 17 samples of take-away coffees, from a mix of independent and high street retailers were taken. Of the nine ‘non milk’ versions (oat/almond/soya latte) – five contained traces

of milk. Again, a vegan customer or someone with a dairy allergy would incorrectly assume there would be no trace of milk.

- Vegan 'ready to eat products' such as sausage rolls, pastries and cakes - 20 samples were taken of which five contained either milk or egg traces.
- Vegan 'takeaway' meals - 16 samples were taken of which six contained traces of either egg, fish or shellfish.

The Chartered Trading Standards Institute is calling for a new legal definition of vegan food to be created to ensure the rules are clear, and that any food manufacturer or restaurant flouting these rules can be held accountable.

This would provide clarity for those with allergies, for example to milk or eggs, over whether food labelled as vegan is safe to eat.

Until that happens, consumers should not rely on the vegan description if they have a serious milk allergy.

Similarly, anyone with allergies really needs to read the label on food products properly, including any 'may contain' information.

In restaurants/cafes they should not rely on the vegan description alone - always have a conversation with the staff.

These are simple steps but can make all the difference.

***Anyone with concerns about the labelling of a food product, or wishing to report an allergy or intolerance reaction, can contact Suffolk Trading Standards via Citizens Advice Consumer Service on 0808 223 1133.**

Ambling African Women break down barriers to accessing Suffolk countryside

Suffolk County Council celebrated the launch of 'Ambling African Women' a new partnership with PHOEBE, the Ipswich-based charity advocating for black and ethnic minority women and children.

The new partnership aims to support PHOEBE members to access the countryside for its health and well-being benefits and is part of the wider work by the Green Access and Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) teams to address inequalities in countryside access.

Founded by Zimbabwean women social workers in 2008, P.H.O.E.B.E (Promotion of Health, Opportunity, Equality, Benevolence and Empowerment) offers specialist domestic abuse advice, information, casework, advocacy and support and counselling services to black and ethnic minoritised women and children in Suffolk.

The Council worked with PHOEBE in 2022 to identify specific cultural barriers to countryside access. The partnership which has been developed will help inform future interventions that will be offered to other community groups facing similar barriers to visiting the countryside.

At the launch event on Tuesday 29 August, Suffolk County Council and its partners hosted a guided walk for around 30-40 women from the PHOEBE centre, who are part of the centre's new Ambling African Women walking group.

There were women of all ages and fitness levels taking part, from babies in pushchairs, up to retirement-age women, with plenty of chatting and socialising along the way. The walk took place at Snape Maltings,

which is in the Coast & Heaths Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, with a guided walk along the Sailors Path from Snape Maltings along the river to Snape Warren and back, followed by lunch and traditional African music.

To keep up to date with what 'Ambling African Women' are up to, you can follow them on Twitter, here: <https://twitter.com/AmblingAfricans>.
