

SUFFOLK COUNTY COUNCILLOR'S REPORT – SEPTEMBER 2022



Cllr Stephen Burroughes - Framlingham Division

• SUFFOLK SUPPORTS YOU WITH THE COST OF LIVING

Column by Councillor Bobby Bennett – Cabinet Member for Equality and Communities

With the current cost of living pressures affecting us all, it has never been more important to ensure that people are supported to receive the right help, when they need it. In Suffolk we have a number of support services ready to help you, your friends or your family, if you are struggling.

The Local Welfare Assistance Scheme helps those experiencing financial hardship, including access to items like household furniture and white goods, fuel vouchers for electricity and gas top-ups, supermarket vouchers, and contributions towards increasing costs during the winter months.

Local organisations across Suffolk can submit an application for support, on behalf of an individual or family. These organisations include Citizens Advice Bureau, district and borough councils, health services and voluntary organisations. A list of these organisations, who will assess your circumstances and submit an application for you, is available at www.suffolk.gov.uk/FinancialHardship

After the recent spell of warm weather it may feel a long way off now, but Autumn and Winter can be a time when energy and fuel costs rise. Suffolk's Warm Homes Healthy People is a project designed to help vulnerable people and families make their homes more energy efficient cheaper to heat. It can help you to access grants to help pay for insulation, basic draught proofing, or first-time central heating. It can also offer emergency support if you need it in the form of temporary heaters or support with emergency boiler repairs.

If high energy bills are preventing you from putting the heating on, or you know any friends, family or neighbours who need extra help heating their home, please contact Warm Homes Healthy People on 03456 037 686 or email whhp@eastssuffolk.gov.uk

There's also a wealth of support in Suffolk for families with young children.

Healthy Start vouchers help parents of children under four years old, to access healthy food and milk. Through the county's Tackling Poverty Strategy, we have been working with health visitors, and partners in the voluntary sector to support eligible families to take up the offer. We identified potential barriers to families accessing services, such as language barriers, and developed promotional materials to make the vouchers more accessible to families in need.

Since work began to promote the Healthy Start vouchers in November 2021 we've seen an 11% increase in those taking up the offer. The most recent data March 2022 shows 72% of those eligible are now taking up the offer.

You may be entitled to Healthy Start Vouchers if you are more than 10 weeks pregnant or have a child under 4. To check if you can apply or to find out more speak to your Midwife or Health Visitor or visit HealthyStart.nhs.uk

The Holiday Activities and Food programme, provides enriching activities to children and young people, as well as free meals during school holidays.

The programme launched in 2021 following a successful pilot in Suffolk in 2019 and 2020 and is backed by government funding of £200 million per year for the next three years.

In 2021, more than 44,800 meals were provided to children in Suffolk through the scheme and more than 48,400 face to face activity sessions took place. These Holiday club activities introduce young people to new experiences and skills, from dance and drama to cooking and gardening, as well providing opportunities for physical and social activity.

More than 33,700 offers of support were offered remotely to children who could not attend the clubs in person. These offers included activity booklets and food packs.

If your child is in receipt of Free School Meals, you may be entitled to support during future school holidays, speak to your school to find out more.

Suffolk County Council recently published its Tackling Poverty Strategy and action plan. The strategy, which has been coproduced with District, Borough and Voluntary Sector partners, along with people with lived experience of poverty, pulls together the many strands of work that have been helping people for many months, as well as looking to the future. You can view the strategy and action plan at: www.suffolk.gov.uk/poverty

Tackling poverty is a system-wide challenge and as such, the work of the Poverty Strategy will report into the Health and Wellbeing Board and Suffolk Public Sector Leaders and Suffolk's Collaborative Communities Board. Suffolk Public Sector Leaders have provided £1 million in hardship funding to support this work.

I want to say a huge thank you to the voluntary community and people who came forward to tell us their stories, which helped us to develop the Strategy and Action Plan.

Finally, if you are struggling or know someone who is, then please look into what help is available.

Visit www.suffolk.gov.uk/FinancialHardship where you can find a list of the support services in Suffolk.

• THE IMPORTANCE OF BUSES

Column by Councillor Richard Smith – Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Transport Strategy and Waste

Public and community transport in rural areas was the topic of a conference I attended recently, and which provided a great deal of food for thought. Organised by Suffolk County Council's passenger transport body Suffolk On Board, the Rural Transport Conversation event examined different ways in which services could be provided in the future. For a largely rural county such as Suffolk this is an important topic because if people do not have access to a car they are largely reliant on public transport. The purpose of the conference was not to come up with instant solutions, rather it was to examine potential ways of working in the future.

There were presentations on how demand responsive transport has been introduced in Kent by the county council there and operator Go2, a similar scheme in Swaffham, Norfolk, a route-planning programme by BT and the work of the National Community Transport Association.

We also heard from BACT Community Transport of Bungay of the issues facing community transport in Suffolk, which includes rising fuel prices, a shortage of volunteer drivers, and people still wary of leaving their homes post-covid.

These are tough times for bus operators. Fuel costs, driver shortages and passenger numbers are just some of the issues they are having to contend with. Government funding has allowed us to pay contracted operators at levels prior to the pandemic, but passenger numbers are still not back to where there were pre-covid.

That funding is due to end in October, and while we are hopeful it may continue in some form there is no guarantee that it will. No operator can run at a loss and, while Suffolk County Council has stepped in to help retain loss-making but socially important services, there is only so much that we can do with the fully committed resources that we have.

However, one piece of good news is that we are about to formally sign the bus passenger charter, a significant step in delivering even better services.

The charter will set out what passengers can expect from both the bus operators and Suffolk County Council, describing the standards of service that will be provided.

Those standards will apply to all bus companies, big and small, commercial or council-supported.

It is a key part of our bus service improvement plan, which sets out how we propose to deliver improved services to support resilient, connected, and sustainable communities across Suffolk, help meet the transition to net zero, and create economic opportunities that benefit everyone.

It is by working together with operators that we make bus services better, more appealing and running smoothly. This will range from before you even set out on your journey – ensuring that there is up-to-date information about services and any disruptions – to what you can expect on your journey, what tickets you can buy and how you can pay for them.

Together we and the operators are working hard to provide the best possible bus service and this charter will play a big part in ensuring standards remain high.

However, the public also has a part to play. The phrase ‘use it or lose it’ applies here because if people do not use buses to the point where they become economically unviable then another phrase risks coming into use – ‘you don’t know what you’ve got until it’s gone’, and the loss of a bus service can have a highly detrimental effect on those people who do rely on it.

Passengers are the lifeblood of any bus service which is why I ask that if you have a journey to make, where there is a bus service available then please consider using it.

One bus can move as many people as several cars, which means more road space for vehicles that do need to be there, such as delivery vans or the emergency services.

The environmental benefit is that less vehicles on the roads also means cleaner air and the reduction of carbon emissions, something which is of benefit to us all.

- **BLUE BADGE ABUSER PROSECUTED AND ORDERED TO PAY £3,504**

On August 11th, an individual was prosecuted as part of an initiative by Councils in Suffolk to tackle the abuse of the Blue Badge scheme. Peter Harrell, of Jasmine Road, Red Lodge, pleaded not guilty on 27 May 2022 at Ipswich Magistrates to altering a blue badge with the intent to deceive, contrary to section 115 of the Road Traffic Act 1984. During a trial on 10 August 2022, Mr Harrell was found guilty and fined £660, and was also ordered to pay investigatory and legal costs of £2778 and a surcharge of £66. Mr Harrell was parked on the Access to Guineas Service Road in Newmarket in November 2021 when a Civil Parking Enforcement Officer (CEO) from West Suffolk District Council noticed that on the badge on display in Mr Harrell’s vehicle the expiry date had been tampered with and the photo defaced and told him that it would be seized.

Mr Harrell told the CEO that the badge belonged to his mother, but an investigation by Suffolk County Council’s Counter-Fraud Service found that she had passed away in August 2020 and the badge had been cancelled the following month. It should then have been returned to the council’s Blue Badge team.

Councillor Beccy Hopfensperger, Cabinet Member for Adult Care at Suffolk County Council, said:

“This prosecution sends a clear message that the misuse of a Blue Badge will not be tolerated in Suffolk. This is not a victimless crime. Illegally using a badge that isn’t yours is denying a disabled parking space to one of the 43,000 registered Blue Badge holders in Suffolk who have a genuine need for them.

“I would like to thank our Counter Fraud Service for their work alongside the district and borough councils in tackling Blue Badge misuse as part of our ongoing commitment to helping the people of Suffolk to live happy and independent lives.”

- **BUS CHARTER TO DELIVER HIGHEST STANDARDS FOR PASSENGERS**

It was announced on August 15th that bus passengers in Suffolk can look forward to higher standards of service following the signing of a new charter. The charter has been signed by Suffolk County Council (SCC) and bus operators covering the county and is a key part of the Suffolk Enhanced Partnership. The Partnership is made up of councils, operators and other stakeholders and supports the improvement of all local bus services operating in the SCC, Local Transport Authority (LTA) area and neighbouring LTA areas where services are cross-boundary. The charter has a wide range of pledges detailing what passengers are entitled to expect before, during and after their journey.

They include:

- Information about service disruptions will be posted on bus company websites, apps, and social media.
- A recognisable bus stop, with access to up-to-date timetable and contact information, and real-time displays at major stops
- To be able to pay to travel by contactless, mobile apps or smartcards – not just cash – and tickets that are easy to understand
- Buses that are clean, comfortable, and accessible
- A clear, consistent process for complaints, feedback, and praise – with a speedy resolution

The charter also outlines the part passengers can play in helping buses run smoothly.

This includes reporting damage to buses, stops, or shelters, having passes, tickets, or fare money ready as they board, and helping keep the bus clean by taking litter home and keeping their feet off the seats.

The charter will be reviewed and renewed every 12 months by the Enhanced Partnership.

More details on the Enhanced Partnership and the passenger charter can be found on Suffolk On Board. Suffolk County Council website.

• **SUFFOLK WASTE PARTNERSHIP TO RAISE AWARENESS OF SAFE BATTERY DISPOSAL**

Suffolk Waste Partnership is backing a nationwide campaign urging people to safely dispose of old batteries in a bid to avoid starting fires in refuse vehicles. The Partnership has signed up to the Stop Battery Fires Campaign launched by national safe electricals recycling group Material Focus, which aims to raise awareness of how householders can properly recycle batteries and electricals.

Batteries, or electricals containing batteries, that end up inside bins or recycling and waste lorries with other materials, get crushed in the waste or recycling process. This can result in them being punctured and self-combusting, setting fire to dry and flammable waste and recycling around them.

In June a fire at the Materials Recycling Facility in Great Blakenham, near Ipswich, which recycles waste from across Suffolk, is suspected to have been started by a battery dumped with household recycling. The fire was located deep within nearly 400 tonnes of waste and took firefighters and staff nearly two hours to extinguish. Electricals containing batteries that tend to be discarded the most are smaller, frequently used and often cheaper electricals like toothbrushes, shavers, chargers and toys. Lithium-ion batteries are responsible for around 48% (more than 200) of all waste fires occurring in the UK each year according to the Environmental Services Association, the trade body representing the UK's resource and waste management industry.

These fires cost some £158 million annually to waste operators, fire services and the environment. Yet the Material Focus survey found 45% of householders are unaware of the fire risk if they do not safely dispose of batteries hidden inside electrical items.

• **SIMPLE SCHEME TO BUY SOLAR PANELS RETURNS FOR SUFFOLK RESIDENTS**

Solar Together Suffolk, a scheme which has helped over 1,500 homes to install solar panels and batteries, opened for new registrations on 22 August 2022. The scheme helps homeowners feel confident that they are paying the right price for a high-quality installation from pre-approved installers, whilst increasing their independence from the grid and reducing their carbon emissions.

Solar Together Suffolk is supported by Suffolk County Council and all local borough and district councils.

From 22 August 2022, Suffolk residents can register for free with the group-buying scheme, with no obligation to go ahead with an installation: www.solartogether.co.uk/suffolk.

It is open to anyone interested in:

- installing new solar panels (with the option for battery storage and EV charge points)
- adding battery storage to an existing solar panel array

The innovative scheme builds on four years of the highly successful Solar Together programme run across the UK. To date, Solar Together Suffolk has:

- installed 17,900 solar panels at over 1,500 Suffolk households
- retrofitted over 200 batteries
- avoided carbon emissions totalling 28,730 tonnes of CO2 across the county

Councillor Andy Drummond, chair of the Suffolk Environment Portfolio Holders Group, said:

“This is the fifth year that Solar Together Suffolk has been rolled out, and I expect it will prove the most popular yet. With electricity prices continuing to climb, more and more homeowners are looking into their own solar power as a way to generate their own clean energy and reduce their bills.

“However, investing in solar panels and battery storage can be a daunting project to take on – knowing who to approach, comparing quotes, trying to understand the complexity of the products or how the process works.

“But Solar Together Suffolk does all that work for you. All you have to do is register your details, and Solar Together will send you a competitive, personalised quote from an approved installer. There is nothing to pay until you decide you want to go ahead with your installation.”

Solar Together Suffolk is one of the projects which contributes to Suffolk’s Climate Emergency Plan, to support and guide residents, communities and businesses to make the changes required to help Suffolk achieve Net Zero by 2030.

How does it work?

- 22 August to 26 September: registration is open, it is free and with no obligation
- 27 September: pre-vetted installers take part in the auction to bid against each other to offer the best deal
- 17 October: a few weeks after the auction you will receive a personal recommendation based on your registration details
- 25 November: your deadline to accept your personal recommendation and proceed with an installation

Support is on-hand throughout the whole process which, together with information sessions, will allow households to make an informed decision in a safe and hassle-free environment.

Suffolk’s local authorities are again working in partnership with independent experts iChoosr to roll out Solar Together Suffolk.

iChoosr has a strong track record of delivering group purchase schemes for local authorities. It has worked with 160 UK local authorities on its collective energy switching schemes. iChoosr’s schemes have also been delivered in partnership with local authorities in five countries. Over 70 schemes led to 110,000 residents installing solar PV systems.

Free registration, with no obligation is open from 22 August to 26 September 2022, submit your details at www.solartogether.co.uk/suffolk.

• **SUFFOLK TO TAKE PART IN TRIAL WALKING & CYCLING ON PRESCRIPTION SCHEME**

Walking and cycling to improve mental and physical health is to be offered by GPs in Suffolk as part of a nationwide trial. The county is one of just 11 areas in England to take part in the £12.7 million scheme announced by the government. The pilots, part of the government’s Gear Change plan published in 2020, aim to evaluate the impact of physical activity through cycling and walking on a person’s health, such as reduced GP appointments and reliance on medication. The scheme in Suffolk will receive £1.5 million and will focus on Ipswich and Lowestoft. The funding will go towards several pilot projects including adult cycle training, free bike loans and walking groups.

Other schemes include all-ability cycling taster days where people who may not have cycled before can try to in a friendly environment, or walking and cycling mental health groups where people can connect with their communities as they get active.

Individuals assessed as being suitable to take part in the scheme will be provided with:

- A bicycle/e-bike or e-cargo bike to be used as a mobility aid (with safety equipment, adaptive cycles/trailers, and secure storage),
- 1-1 support with learn to ride/cycle confidence/Bikeability training,
- Basic bike maintenance
- Journey planning using the local cycle network
- 'Buddy riding' to destinations such as workplaces, schools, or shops to build confidence for everyday journeys.

Stakeholders led by the Public Health and Transport Strategy teams at Suffolk County Council include the primary care networks, Healthwatch Suffolk, Community Action Suffolk, Active Suffolk, and the University of Suffolk Integrated Care Academy. The county's former NHS clinical commissioning groups - now Suffolk and North East Essex Integrated Care System and Norfolk and Waveney Integrated Care System – are also stakeholders. The pilots will be delivered between 2022 and 2025 with on-going monitoring and evaluation to support continued learning.

The project brings together a range of government departments and agencies including:

- NHS England
- Office for Health Improvement and Disparities
- Sport England
- National Academy for Social Prescribing
- Defra
- Department for Health and Social Care

• **COUNCIL TO BOOST ELECTRIC VEHICLE CHARGING ACROSS SUFFOLK**

It was announced on August 24th that the council submitted a bid of £1,362,000 to the Department for Transport, as part of the Local EV Infrastructure (LEVI) pilot scheme. Suffolk's residents and visitors will see further improvements to the county's electric vehicle (EV) charging network, following Suffolk County Council's successful bid to fund more charging points. With additional contributions such as commercial funding, the project will see a total investment of around £2.75m.

The new LEVI funding will allow the council to develop the county's EV charging network by:

- PV solar power and battery storage upgrades to approximately 10 existing sites
- Installing community EV charging, PV solar power and battery storage at over 30 further sites in urban and rural areas
- Identifying key commercial sites for 7kW, rapid and ultra rapid chargers, which will benefit the local community

Suffolk County Council has led the way in electric vehicle charging, following the launch of Plug In Suffolk in 2019. It was the UK's first 'fully open' public EV fast charging network and has seen other local authorities around the country follow that model. Plug In Suffolk has now installed 100 charging points around the county, with an emphasis on installations in rural locations and supporting households without off-street charging capabilities.

This project contributes to Suffolk's commitment to be Net Zero by 2030. The Suffolk Climate Emergency Plan identified that decarbonisation of vehicles in Suffolk was a key aspect of meeting that target.

For further information from my report or questions please contact me at:

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