



## Hartismere Division

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Over the past year the County Council has worked with its partners to fulfil its core responsibilities and deliver on our priorities which are to support vulnerable residents, strengthen Suffolk's economy, protect and improve the environment, and provide value for the taxpayer. The past year has seen pressures on the council budget from inflation, the Ukraine war, and pandemic recovery. In response council tax has been raised by 3.99% of which 2% is ring fenced for social care. In addition, £4.4m of unallocated reserves has been used to meet the 2023/24 basic budget of just over £545M. Overall the financial position is sound though challenging.

Some key council programmes over the past year have been organising Homes for Ukraine, transformation of Adult and Community Services (ACS), increasing support to children with Special Educational Needs (SEND), awarding a new Highways contract, investing in decarbonisation, and managing a large increase in Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs).

- **Communities & Customer Services** – The council is responsible for an array of services including Registrars, Coroners, Libraries, Museums and Archives, Asylum Seekers referred by the Home Office, Community Safety, Fire & Rescue Services, Trading Standards and others. More information on these services and partner organisations can be found on the web platform [www.suffolk.gov.uk](http://www.suffolk.gov.uk)
- **Education, Schools & Young People** – to increase local teacher training opportunities, the council initiated a joint programme with Norfolk and University of Suffolk to gain government accreditation for a new School Centred Initial Teacher Training programme. Financing of £32m has been secured to build or expand 21 schools in the County. The Council is also working with schools to secure grants for decarbonisation such as that in progress at Botesdale Primary.
- **Supporting SEND** - £45million has been allocated by Suffolk County Council to deliver new in-County SEND places; Phase 1 is in progress and creates 825 new places across Suffolk and Phase 2, agreed in June 2022, will create up to 73 new places. A third phase agreed in March will provide 3 new specialist units. In combination, these new facilities will greatly reduce long trips to school and out of County placements.
- **Homes for Ukraine** – Over 1,200 people have arrived in Suffolk since this programme started, at present 741 remain with 335 host families. Government guidance now supports people to stay with their hosts for up to 2 years. New hosts are always needed.
- **Adult & Social Care** – The Council is working with care providers to increase recruitment and retention, and has run a successful apprenticeship scheme over the past year with 27

currently in the programme. A recruitment drive through the Home First Reablement Service initiated in August has increased the social care workforce substantially. In December the Council along with the NHS West Suffolk Alliance piloted a digital service (Cassius) to help patients and carers monitor their conditions. This has been well received and will scale up from an initial 100 people to over 350 this summer.

- **Environment & Climate Change** - £1.5m was committed in the prior budget to implement the Suffolk's Climate Emergency Plan, the first carbon budget. The Council first partnered with *Plug In Suffolk* in 2019. Over 100 charging points have been installed to date with an emphasis on rural locations and areas without off-street charging capabilities. The council submitted a successful bid of £1,362,000 in August to the Department for Transport as part of a Local EV Infrastructure pilot scheme to expand EV charging capacity. A new guideline for developers has been issued to achieve sustainable low-carbon neighbourhoods and the infrastructure necessary - see the [Suffolk Design: Streets Guide](#).
- **Tree Planting** – Working with the Woodland Trust, the Council has planted almost 50K trees this winter, additional to over 200K planted over the past two years. A contractor, Giles Landscapes is assisting the Council with monitoring its planting programme and improving survival of native spp such as oak and hornbeam. The Council's County Farms Estate has hosted a number of the new tree planting schemes, but more land is needed.
- **Breck's Fen Edge & Rivers Project** – This is a Heritage Lottery funded project initiated in 2017 by Norfolk & Suffolk County Council and other partners <https://brecks.org/BFER/> . A review was conducted in winter 2022 by Glevum Consulting, and indications are very positive. A large number of people have been involved including schools, land owners, and volunteers to improve riparian conditions, water quality, and public awareness.
- **Highways Contract** - Milestone Infrastructure, part of M Group Services, has been awarded Suffolk's new highways services contract, which will begin on 1 October 2023. Milestone will be the Council's new contract partner for up to 20 years under a contract to provide projects including but not limited to maintaining roads, pavements and rights of way, drainage, hedge trimming, construction of new road schemes, snow-clearing and gritting.
- **Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects** - In addition to Sizewell C, the Council's planning team has needed to comment on multiple large new projects such as Sunnica's approx. 2,000-acre proposed solar farm on the Cambridge border, two proposed sub-sea interconnectors in East Suffolk, additional 30km grid reinforcement on the Bramford to Twinstead 400 kV line between Ipswich and Sudbury, and National Grid's proposed 50-m high East Anglia Green pylon line between Norwich and Tilbury. We are actively engaging with the proponents of these schemes and working cooperatively with our colleagues in neighbouring counties. The Council has secured £54K from the government to run a Centre of Excellence to support area local authorities in responding to NSIPs, and to help represent the public interest.