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# **Parish Report –March 2024**

# **Councillor Penny Otton**

**Council Budget for 2024-25**

At Council on 15 February, Suffolk councillors met to discuss and vote on the administration’s budget proposals. The council is borrowing heavily from its reserves to meet the growing demand for social care for adults and children, and council tax is due to rise by £74 annually for Band D properties from April this year. There will also be cuts to Family Hubs (children’s centres) and Housing Related Support, which supports vulnerable people like care leavers to find accommodation. Funding for arts and museums will be maintained for 2024-25 but not from SCC core funding, and subject to a bidding process for grants from April 2025. The Bury St Edmunds local archives will be moved to The Hold in Ipswich, which like the arts funding cuts has been controversial locally.

My group were concerned about the lack of core funding from Suffolk County Council to arts and museums, we proposed an amendment and suggested that some of the council’s remaining Covid funding from the government be used to support young people not in education, employment or training, as this cohort had suffered a lot of upheaval in their final years of schooling and exams.

SIX BELLS SITE APPLICATION. Well done Nicky Simon and Nick for attending the meeting and to get it turned down

**FLOODING; yet again our area was severely hit by yet another storm and heavy rain. I attended the meeting in Gt Finborough where parishes got together , it was obvious that the main problem is the various authorities don,t work together to get things sorted out. Have sent details of the scrutiny committee on 12 march which will be discussing flooding across the county.**

**. LOCAL SCHOOLS; I have asked for an pdate on 2 local schools; Stowmarket and Stowupland high schools. Following a report Stowupland now has a “super head to try to improve standards.. Due to RAAC this will be rebuilt However the special school is performing fine**

**Stowmarket; with a change to the CEO of the trust a new head has been engaged to agin make improvements.**

**Thurston community college will be rebuilt although this was always in the plans.The 6th form will probably move to the Thurston site.**

**Ofsted/CQC SEND Inspection Report**

As you may have read in the local press, Ofsted and CQC published their joint report into SEND services in Suffolk at the beginning of the month. The report was scathing. My group was disappointed and concerned that the services are yet to get to grips with this and offered our assistance to the Local Area Partnership (Suffolk County Council and NHS teams) in preparing the Priority Action Plan they now need to submit to Ofsted and CQC by 7 March.

The poor report led to the resignation of the Cabinet members for SEND, Education and Children’s Services and prompted a reshuffle of the political leadership at the council.

**Suffolk Devolution in Sight**

Devolution is something there has been a lot of talk about in Suffolk in recent years, and it looks like it may be happening from 2025. The deal the government is offering Suffolk is the same as the one for Norfolk and would give the county more freedom on decisions and funding for transport, skills and adult education, regenerating brownfield sites and retrofitting homes to make them more energy-efficient. If the deal is approved, the leader of Suffolk County Council would **be directly elected by the people of Suffolk** - **every four years, residents will be given two votes, to elect their local county councillor AND the leader (mayor)of the county council. However the new leader CANNOT ALSO BE A COUNTY COUNCILLOR.**

**The first election would take place in May 2025**. The council will be consulting on the deal soon and residents will be able to give their opinions on the changes proposed. For more information, see <https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/devolution> This will not be a referendum but the findings will be prented to SCC cabinet then for a decision at full council in June/July

**Changes to Local Archives**

Following the recent controversial proposal in the county council’s budget to move local records from Bury St Edmunds to The Hold in Ipswich, the council have announced that that they will be inviting community representatives from both Lowestoft and Bury St Edmund's to form two new Working Parties to consider local access to historical material. This could allow relevant collections to remain in the local area, but any proposals would need to be funded locally rather than by Suffolk County Council. This is not a reversal of the council’s decision, and the majority of the records are still planned to move to The Hold, with the North-East and West Suffolk branches of the archive service to close.

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Cost of Living help and advice:

<https://infolink.suffolk.gov.uk/kb5/suffolk/infolink/family.page?familychannel=6>

Benefits advice and support:

<https://infolink.suffolk.gov.uk/kb5/suffolk/infolink/adult.page?adultchannel=0>

Flood preparation advice: <https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/suffolk-fire-and-rescue-service/fire-and-rescue-safety-advice-in-the-community/preparing-for-flooding>

Flood recovery advice and support: <http://www.suffolk.gov.uk/about/flood-recovery-information-for-suffolk>