

July 2013 report for the Thredling Division from Cllr Matthew Hicks

Broadband roll-out ahead of schedule

The provision of high-speed broadband across Suffolk is currently running ahead of target. While reports in the media this week have suggested that there are delays in the roll-out of broadband, that's most definitely not the case here in Suffolk. Currently in phase one of the programme, by Christmas fibre broadband will have been rolled-out to 8,391 premises across the county. Planning is already underway for the next phase of the roll-out, which will see a further 10,417 premises benefitting from fibre broadband by the spring of 2014. While Suffolk is a highly-rural county, with the implementation issues that this can bring, everything is currently running ahead of schedule and expected to be completed by 2015 as originally planned.

Strong financial management brings underspend for 2012/13

The final report on council spending for the last financial year – 2012/13 – shows that SCC underspent on its planned budget by £3.5million. Given the tough financial settlement that the council faced, and the fact that the council saved £26million last year whilst freezing council tax, this underspend is a vivid illustration of exceptionally-strong and prudent financial management in operation. Such watchful planning means that the council is in a strong position as plans are drawn up to meet the £156million budget gap which is anticipated over the next four years. This budget gap is made up of reductions to our government grant, coupled with increased demand for services and inflationary pressures.

SCC Cabinet set to discuss 'Raising the Bar' recommendations

Following the publication, by the RSA, of their report into education in Suffolk, the council's cabinet will shortly discuss the 20 recommendations. The RSA's report: 'No School an Island' was commissioned as part of the council's Raising the Bar initiative, to raise educational attainment and aspiration levels in the county. The recommendations include the need for school governors to be more strategic, challenging and ambitious, for very-small schools to federate with other similar schools, for investment in the development of a wider pool of excellent teachers, and for Suffolk Schools to form a partnership with their counterparts in a London Borough which has made great strides forward recently, in order to learn from the steps that they took.

Teacher-training partnership praised

Staying on the subject of education, a partnership to develop teacher training, between Suffolk and Norfolk, has been strongly praised by Ofsted. 'Suffolk and Norfolk Initial Teacher Training', which involves both county councils together with UCS and nearly 300 schools in the two counties, was informed that its training courses were excellent. The programmes they run are all school-based, with trainees spending most of their time alongside experienced teachers in local schools. The programmes were praised for delivering consistently-high levels of progression to employment.

And finally:

Suffolk sees above-average numbers taking a punt on Oxbridge

One final education story: While SCC is working hard to help drive up standards in education across the board, many local students are already excelling. Recent figures show that the number of Suffolk students heading for the dreaming spires or the sun-kissed, punt-filled rivers of Oxford and Cambridge is above the national average. 1% of all Suffolk pupils won places at the two top universities, compared with 0.7% of pupils across the country.

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