

Opposition successfully “call in” Suffolk County Council school transport cuts

On Tuesday 19 June, Suffolk County Council’s Cabinet voted to change the Home to School Transport policy so that only children travelling to their nearest school would receive free transport. The changes are due to be phased in from September 2019 so existing students will see no change unless their families move.

As you will be aware, my colleagues and I within the Liberal Democrat, Green and Independent Group are opposed to this policy change. We are not convinced that evidence from Essex shows that predicted savings will be realised. We believe that the impact on families who do not drive their children to school will be high. There has also been very vocal opposition from schools, parents, and carers across Suffolk. Schools are concerned that there will be large changes to the number of pupils they attract, based on cost of transport, not quality and breadth of education.

Following the Cabinet meeting, opposition councillors from all parties united to “call-in” the decision. We have received confirmation from the Monitoring Officer that the concerns presented within our call-in are valid.

However, yesterday the conservative members of the committee felt that the view that recent increases in the budget were not affordable to the county was valid and that the clear overestimate of future cost increases did not represent a failure to present to cabinet an accurate view of the position. They would not accept that evidence from other counties suggests that the change to a nearest school police may well increase costs or the view from the schools most affected that there are options which will deliver more certain savings with less disruption. Therefore, the call in was rejected and the phased introduction of the change will go ahead.

Scrutiny

Our next meeting will cover the election of the Vice-Chair, the call-in, and the election of the chair of the Joint Flood Risk Management Scrutiny Sub- Committee. We will then review the Council’s response to our recommendations on The County Council’s role in working with partners to tackle domestic abuse in Suffolk.

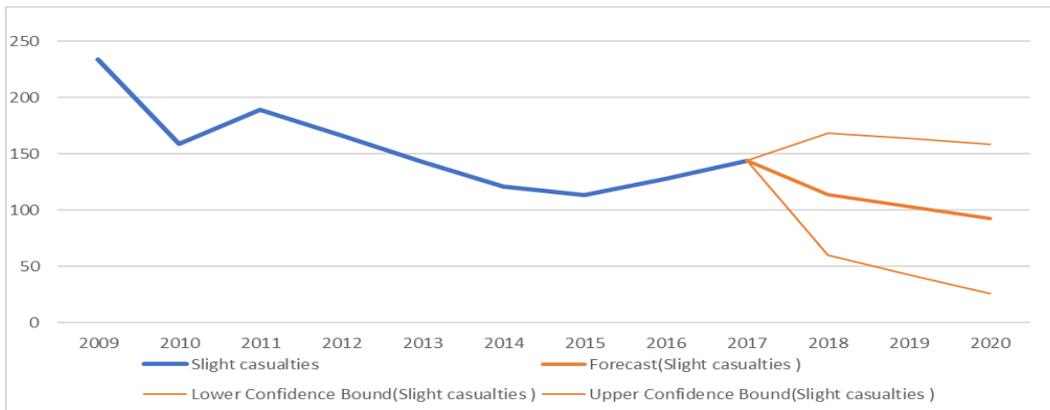
Finally, we will consider an extensive information bulletin of 11 items including a report on the Adult Mental Health, Learning Disability and Autism service area to provide further analysis of the spend on care services. There are currently just over 2000 people being supported at an average spend per person of £731 per week. 1241 people have care and support plans of less than £731 per week;770 have a package that costs more

- The weekly commitment for the 1000 customers with the lowest cost care and support plans is £206,999
- The weekly commitment for the 1000 customers with the highest cost care and support plans is £1,276,103.

There is also a report we asked for on child road casualties which contains the table below. The prediction I have added shows things are moving in the right direction despite the increases in the last two years.

Year	Fatal casualties	Serious casualties	Fatal & Serious (KSI)	Slight casualties	Total	% of KSI/all severities
2009	0	35	35	234	269	13
2010	1	20	21	159	180	12
2011	1	22	23	189	212	11
2012	1	31	32	166	198	16
2013	0	18	18	143	161	11

2014	1	15	16	121	137	12
2015	0	9	9	113	122	7
2016	1	18	19	128	147	13
2017	0	28	28	144	172	16
Overall	5	196	201	1397	1598	12



Major review of Suffolk Highways announced

The new Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Highways, Cllr Mary Evans, has launched a major review of the way highways in Suffolk are maintained.

Areas due to be reviewed include:

- Existing policy which determines how resources are deployed, known as the Suffolk Highway Maintenance Operational Plan (HMOP);
- How the location of potholes on the road is considered alongside the width and depth, recognising the impact they can have on cyclists and motorcyclists;
- How utility companies coordinate roadworks and are held to account for their actions;
- How residents, councillors and businesses are informed about road repairs and how they can access information;
- Financial control and contract management;
- How town and parish councils can work closer with Suffolk Highways to make the best use of their local knowledge, skills, money, and time.

Consultation launched on future commissioning of specialist education services

Suffolk County Council have launched a 6-week consultation into the commissioning strategy for the development of Suffolk's specialist educational provision. This will look at three options for meeting the additional demand. See: <http://www.suffolk.gov.uk/SENDSufficiencyeducation>

Demand for specialist education places in Suffolk for children with SEND continues to grow. Currently we have a much lower number of places than other similar authorities. This means that many children in Suffolk are forced to travel out of county and often Suffolk County Council foots the considerable bill.

At a time when the Council is attempting to reduce the amount of free home to school transport it provides, over fears of escalating costs, it is vital that we begin to provide more SEND provision within Suffolk.

Local Roads

At long last Hackney's Corner in Great Blakenham is beginning to look as though it is nearing completion. However, the down side is that the replacement of the gas main on Bramford Road is

If you have queries, please phone me on 01473 831306 or 07545423808 or email me at: john.field@suffolk.gov.uk

about to start. The road will be closed for about six weeks diverting traffic through Claydon or along the B1113 to Stowmarket, a route it is difficult to imagine even HGV drivers will take.

I have raised the congestion issue with the county Network Assurance team and the cabinet member but am told there is no alternative. Work will be organised to minimise inconvenience and duration but prepare for a storm on Twitter and Facebook.

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