

Accountability and transparency of Suffolk Public Sector Leaders Board

The Suffolk Public Sector Leaders Board (SPSLB) is made up of council leaders and chief executives from across Suffolk, as well as the PCC, chief fire officer and representatives from Suffolk's Clinical Commissioning Groups. The SPSLB controls a large pot of money, made up of £7.447m from the Suffolk business rates pool and £3.23m of central government funding received as part of the Transformation Challenge Award.

The Liberal Democrat, Green and Independent Group are very concerned about the accountability and transparency of the SPSLB. Their meetings are held in private with no minutes and neither residents nor councillors are made aware of the group's decisions, financial or otherwise. Given the vast amount of money they control, this secrecy is very concerning.

At the end of January, we met with the Interim Chief Executive at Suffolk County Council to query why there is so little accountability within the SPSLB. I have been informed that, based on our queries, the SPSLB will be reconsidering its governance arrangements. I will keep you informed of any further updates.

Next phase of "Raising the Bar" strategy announced

The Cabinet has approved the Raising the Bar 2018-20 strategy. This is the third phase of the programme, which began in 2012 and is focused on improving educational standards throughout Suffolk. The new strategy will focus on three priorities:

1. Exceptional leadership and governance across the education sector
2. Excellence in teaching and learning, driven by system led improvement and innovation
3. The best opportunities for every child and young person

The strategy also includes the very ambitious goal to place the education system in Suffolk among the top 25% nationally. No other "shire" authority has achieved this, and the report acknowledges that it would likely take several years to reach this goal.

I am concerned that no new funding has been allocated to this phase of the Raising the Bar programme. The goals of the strategy are ambitious and will not be achievable without adequate investment, and so I question whether the Cabinet are fully committed to improving educational outcomes in Suffolk.

Suffolk to set up an outcomes-based contract to support adolescents on the edge of care

Suffolk's Cabinet has agreed to set up a new outcomes-based contract, to provide intensive therapeutic support for adolescents at the edge of care, via a private service provider. The idea is to reduce the need for and costs of adolescents coming into the care of Suffolk County Council, by providing intervention services that seek to keep children safely with their families. Payments will only be made if children are not taken into care, or are returned to their families.

The contract will be funded by a Social Impact Bond: this means that private investors will provide the start-up capital and running costs for the service and will receive a return on investment if the service is successful at keeping children out of care. A similar contract and service exists in Essex, and a small number of local authorities across the UK are beginning to implement similar contracts

I am concerned about the use of a payment by results contract where vulnerable children are involved, given the risk of putting profit ahead of the wellbeing of these children. Suffolk County Council have assured me that the authority's team of social workers will oversee the service and prevent this from happening, but the administrative costs of doing this properly could be substantial.

The contract is due to be awarded in summer 2018, with contract mobilisation from autumn 2018.

New drone technology for managing blue light service incidents

On 15 February, it was announced that emergency services across Suffolk would have access to two Small Unmanned Surveillance Aircraft, commonly referred to as drones. This has been developed and funded by Suffolk Resilience Forum for use across the county.

As part of a multi-agency Air Support Unit, the drones will be used by Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service, Suffolk Constabulary, Suffolk County Council, Suffolk Lowland Search and Rescue and Norfolk & Suffolk 4x4 Response. The drones will provide a range of aerial surveillance options to support these emergency services and voluntary organisations.

Update on Ipswich's Upper Orwell Crossings

Suffolk County Council have announced the preferred alignments of Ipswich's Upper Orwell Crossings.

The main crossing is proposed to connect to the existing highway at the Rapier Street roundabout on Wherstead Road, west of the river, and at a new junction, north of Cliff Lane on Holywells Road, east of the river. The bridge crosses the river at an angle and incorporates an opening section over the navigation channel. The second crossing will provide a new vehicular link to the Wet Dock Island site and is proposed to be accessed from Felaw Street. The third crossing is a refurbishment of the existing swing bridge over the lock for use by cyclists and pedestrians.

A public information day was held on 6 March, a chance to ask questions about the project.

Scrutiny

On the 8th March we scrutinised the Suffolk efforts to improve attainment at Key Stage 2 in Mathematics. There are some interesting figures like those below including some that showed schools in deprived areas performing well and others in prosperous areas doing badly. Leadership appeared to be the vital factor but academies where that has changed significantly did not appear to be doing well.

Attainment figures by school type - % achieving the expected standard 2017

	LA maintained	Academies	Convertors	Sponsored
Suffolk	73%	66%	70%	62%
National	76%	75%	78%	67%

Attainment Figures by nearest neighbour authorities 2017

LA	Attainment	LA	Progress
Gloucestershire	75.27	Gloucestershire	0.1
Shropshire	75.21	Shropshire	-0.5
Devon	74.3	Devon	-0.7
Dorset	71.56	East Sussex	-0.8
Cornwall	71.49	Cornwall	-1
Somerset	71.39	Suffolk	-1.1
Lincolnshire	70.44	Somerset	-1.2
Worcestershire	70.04	Lincolnshire	-1.2
Suffolk	69.96	Worcestershire	-1.3
East Sussex	69.56	Norfolk	-1.4
Norfolk	68.8	Dorset	-1.5

Barham and Claydon Planning

The application for 312 houses at the Whitton end of the Old Ipswich Road was rejected at planning referrals, despite the need to follow planning law and the need for housing. I am surer the application will be back, perhaps modified to address its deficiencies or through the appeals process.

Local opinions were expressed well particularly the desire for a buffer from Ipswich, and given substantial weight. Education, highways, and environmental considerations, particularly noise, were important.

One useful step forward was that the County is at last aware of the overall numbers of houses proposed in Gipping Valley, which hosts a large part of the Mid Suffolk Ipswich Fringe. The total so far approaches 2000.

If you have queries please phone me on 01473 831306 or 07545423808 or email me at:
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The application for 300 houses on Barham Church Lane will be at Planning Referrals Committee on the afternoon of Wednesday 14th March.

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