

SUFFOLK COUNTY COUNCILLOR'S REPORT – FEBRUARY 2021



Cllr Stephen Burroughes - Framlingham Division

- **HAVE YOUR SAY ON THE POST-16 TRAVEL POLICY FOR 2021/2022**

On 7 January, the council announced it is seeking views on its proposed Post-16 Travel Policy for the 2021/2022 school year. The consultation will be open until the 15 February 2021 for people to have their say on the proposed changes. The amendments are designed to ensure that the policy is clearer for parents/carers and students to understand what travel options there are for travelling to sixth form, college or Post-16 education. The council's proposals for the policy are currently:

1. Make the annual increase to the charge of Post-16 travel and the cost of a spare seat as previously agreed by Suffolk County Council's (SCC) Cabinet on 19 June 2018.
2. Consider how we might align the Post-16 policy to the School Travel (5-16) policy to support students to attend their nearest Suffolk school sixth form even when they live nearer to a school sixth form outside of the county.
3. Enable a student to continue to attend their Transport Priority Area School when transport had been protected under the School Travel Policy for 5-16 year olds in September 2019 assuming that they meet the necessary criteria.
4. Clarify Suffolk County Council's Independent Travel Training scheme.

- **CORONAVIRUS RAPID TESTING CENTRE OPENS AT UNIVERSITY OF SUFFOLK**

On the 13 January A new Covid-19 rapid testing centre has opened at University of Suffolk for people without symptoms in Suffolk. The centre, based at the former Profiles gym at the University of Suffolk in Ipswich, provides lateral flow testing, with results delivered in under an hour. The tests (LFTs) are most useful at identifying people who are infectious on the day of the test but not showing symptoms. The centre has been opened by Suffolk County Council (SCC) in partnership with the University of Suffolk. Testing is for anyone working in the town who cannot work from home.

Also targeted are employers and organisations in Ipswich whose staff cannot work from home. They are being urged to block-book their workforce in for tests.

However, people showing symptoms of Covid-19, or have been in close contact with someone who has, should not visit the centre – instead they should ring 119 or go to the NHS website to book a test at one of the 12 symptomatic testing sites in Suffolk.

The centre began operating on January 4 testing teachers, university students, school pupils and support staff. The test involves taking a swab from the throat and nose to see whether coronavirus is present in the body. The person tested will then receive a text message giving the result within an hour. Anyone giving a:

- **positive test** will be told to self-isolate and advised on what to do next, including the need for further testing.
- **negative result** is invited back to carry out a further test after a few days. This is in case levels of the virus in a person at the earlier test were too low to be detected at that time.

The testing is being run by contractors Commisceo on behalf of SCC through government funding.

- **NEW VEHICLE BANNERS ENCOURAGE SUFFOLK TO BE FOOD AND FREEZER SAVVY**

On January 18, it was announced that Waste and recycling vehicles in Suffolk will help to deliver the food savvy message and cut food waste across the county. Over 50,000 tonnes of food is thrown away in Suffolk every year, and an estimated average of £730 of edible food goes to waste per household each year. The fleet of 24 vehicles display the new banners, which have three simple messages with easy advice for people to follow.

- Bananas – one of the most commonly wasted food items across the UK. You can bake with them or blend them rather than throw them in the bin.
- Bread – another of the most commonly wasted food items. You can freeze or toast bread to prevent it from being wasted.
- Freezing - food storage is key to preventing food waste. Check the dates on your food and remember to freeze it when it is nearly out of date. Bread, bananas, cheese and even milk can all be frozen!

- **NEW HOME-SCHOOLING RESOURCE 'A GODSEND'**

On the January 19, A new digital resource was launched to help parents and carers build exercise into the daily routines of children being home schooled during lockdown. Providing information about, and access to, a host of curriculum-based and other popular resources, the resource brings together, in one place, everything parents could need to bring exercise into the home in a fun and engaging way. Produced as part of the popular Keep Moving Suffolk campaign, it responds to data showing that activity levels of children and young people have fallen significantly during lockdown prompting fears of a long-term impact on their physical and mental health and wellbeing.

- **SUFFOLK 2020 FUND PROJECT EMBRACES LOVE OF THE GREAT OUTDOORS – DISCOVERING SUFFOLK**

On January 20, as part of the Suffolk 2020 fund, the Discovering Suffolk project was launched. The aim of the project is to raise further awareness of the range of great walking routes, areas of interest and variety of landscapes that form Suffolk's beautiful countryside through public rights of way and points of access. Given

the experiences many people have faced over the last year living through the pandemic, it is recognised that exercise and wellbeing is a fundamental element in maintaining a healthy lifestyle, and whilst we continue to live within Government guidelines at present, Suffolk's countryside offers a freely accessible means for many of us to experience nature and stay healthy.

The key element of the Discovering Suffolk project is the development of a smartphone app alongside a range of supporting QR codes fixed to rights of way signposts located along different routes to promote walking, cycling and exploring Suffolk's countryside.

Discovering Suffolk builds on our changing behaviours when visiting the countryside, as people become ever more interested in local exploration and taking short walks and cycling exercises during the pandemic. The project will continue to promote the Discover Suffolk website as new content, information and advice continues to be added to the current offer, promoting walking routes and cycle rides through local communities. The project seeks to actively engage new audiences who are not aware of the options available on their doorstep or have perhaps only begun to explore the local countryside beyond their neighbourhood.

Work will shortly start on developing the Discovering Suffolk App and setting the sites for the QR code points around the county. After development, the new, free App will provide access to the full range of Discover Suffolk outdoor guides with over 100 walks across the county. The App and QR codes will include audio, video, imagery and fun activities to further enhance people's enjoyment, appreciation and understanding of Suffolk's natural and built environment.

- **STRONG INTEREST SHOWN BY SUFFOLK'S COMMUNITIES TO ENGAGE WITH 2020 FUND**

On January 21, it was announced the council had received 50 expressions of interest from local communities across the county which want to host new electric vehicle charging points. This follows the launch of the Suffolk 2020 funded project in September. Suffolk has long held ambitions to Create the Greenest County and as part of the Suffolk 2020 fund, which is all about investing in community projects to support the council's climate emergency declaration and improve Suffolk for all residents in years to come, this year £300,000 has been invested into creating 100 fast charging points in rural areas of the county. Reaching 50 expressions of interest so quickly demonstrates great progress for the project and suggests that many communities can see the real benefits in being part of the Plug In Suffolk scheme.

At present, the majority of EV charging points are concentrated in our larger towns such as Bury St Edmunds, Ipswich and Lowestoft, but given the new expressions of interest, it is hoped that new fast charging points can begin to be installed across a range of more rural locations including Beccles, Wilby, Horringer, Orford, Long Melford and Tuddenham St Martin.

The strong interest comes from local Parish Councils and communities who can see the potential benefit in hosting charging points at rural village halls, community buildings, sports clubs and even places of worship besides commercial buildings and shops elsewhere. The council has begun to undertake site surveys and plan for the initial installations that will take place in the coming weeks. Once installed, each host community takes a share of the income generated by drivers who pay to charge their cars in the locality. Ultra-low emission vehicle ownership has nearly trebled in the last three years within Suffolk and this is set to continue to grow even faster with Government vehicle initiatives. In total, there are around 422,000 cars licensed in Suffolk, but currently just under 2,500 of these are ultra-low emission cars. With an improved charging network across the county, the council believes this will encourage greater electric vehicle ownership in Suffolk in years to come .

- **SUFFOLK FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE PRAISED FOR ITS WORK THROUGHOUT THE PANDEMIC**

On January 22nd, Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service was recognised nationally for its response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) was praised for its positive contributions to the local community and commitment to the welfare of its staff. In August 2020, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) was commissioned by the Home Secretary to examine how fire and rescue services are responding to the pandemic.

In her report, Zoë Billingham, HM Inspector of Fire & Rescue Services, said of Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service:

“We were impressed with how the service adapted and responded to the pandemic effectively. The efficient use of its staff was notable, utilising extra capacity and providing support and resource for remote and home working. It provided support to Suffolk County Council (SCC) and the LRF, including advice, resources and effective command and control frameworks to co-ordinate its response.

“The service communicated well with its staff throughout the pandemic, including issues relating to staff wellbeing. It also made sure all staff had the resources they needed to do their jobs effectively, including extra information and technology, and it put in place additional flexible working arrangements. Staff wellbeing was a clear priority for the service.”

SFRS has continued to respond to emergency calls since the beginning of the pandemic, with over 4,500 emergency calls since the first lockdown was announced in March 2020. In addition to this, staff across SFRS have been redeployed to support other departments in Suffolk County Council, in response to the pandemic.

These include:

- Providing additional resource to colleagues in the Coroner’s Office
- Setting up and administering the first booking system and phoneline for testing key workers

- In April 2020, around 30 firefighters volunteered and trained to work alongside paramedics to drive frontline emergency NHS ambulances, in turn freeing up paramedics to care for patients
- Teams have also helped deliver food, essential items and medicine as part of the Home But Not Alone scheme

- **HELP US SHAPE AMBITIOUS NEW DEMENTIA THERAPY INITIATIVE USING VIRTUAL REALITY EXPERIENCES**

On the 28 January it was announced that as part of its work in supporting local care home providers and the ongoing care of residents with Dementia, Suffolk County Council is launching an exciting new initiative to develop virtual reality content, helping people recall and access positive memories that they hold dearly. Such experiences help to complement the support offered on a day to day basis, providing a variety of positive stimulus to those using the equipment and valuable respite for their carers.

In recent years, a number of international academic studies have demonstrated proven successes in using such technology as a reminiscence and therapeutic aid to help people access memories and positive emotions, despite facing the effects of experiencing Dementia. Some care providers already use theme rooms in their settings and show archive films to residents with positive effect. Developing the use of virtual reality will support and complement the great experiences that local care providers use.

The intention is to produce a range of local, Suffolk-based films and interactive materials that people can enjoy and experience whilst sat in comfort in their usual care setting, with the support and input of their carers or family members. A set of equipment, each consisting of a headset and connecting equipment will be made available to support different areas of the county, supported by the Council's Adult Social Work Teams. A budget of £80,000 has been granted for this project through Suffolk County Council's Suffolk 2020 Fund, which is all about developing a range of community-focussed initiatives to support residents across the county. This money covers the cost of developing the films and materials, carrying out supporting academic research, the purchase of the equipment and the management and resourcing required to deliver the project in coming months. As part of getting the ball rolling, the council would like to hear from people who have ideas about what kinds of films and experiences they may like to see produced. The project team would also love to hear from care providers, service users and their family carers across Suffolk that may be potentially interested in helping to trial and take part in using the technology in months to come and take part in a service user group to drive the success of this project.

Those who are interested in taking part and/or sharing the ideas for possible content should contact the team in the first instance by emailing: suffolk2020vr@suffolk.gov.uk

For further information from my report or questions please contact me at:
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