

July 2023 report for the Thredling Division from Cllr Matthew Hicks

Suffolk Fire Service to bring control room back to the County

Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service has announced plans to create a new fire control centre here in Suffolk. Since October 2011, Suffolk has shared a control room with Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Fire and Rescue Service in Huntingdon. The joint project has worked well, saving both fire services money and enabling greater cross-border resource sharing. However, the company behind a project to deliver a new IT system, initiated in 2019, has run into technical and financial problems, causing a significant delay. This, in addition to advancements in technology, has led to the decision to bring fire control back into the county by the end of 2024. We have enjoyed a successful partnership with Cambridgeshire, and it served as a national example of how well sharing resources across counties could work. It is time, however, to bring fire control back into our county and under direct Suffolk leadership. We are committed to delivering the most effective and efficient services to our residents, and in this case, it is essential that we strive to find and develop a solution which is robust, sustainable and works for Suffolk. A new, Suffolk-based control room, with its own market, tried and tested fire engine mobilisation software, will mean modernised IT systems and improved public and firefighter safety in Suffolk. Following detailed talks with Cambridgeshire the decision has been made to bring fire control back into Suffolk. This decision has not been taken lightly and will take time to implement, however, we are confident it is achievable and the right way forward. Communities in Suffolk will not be impacted by this decision. We remain committed to providing excellent prevention, protection, and response to our residents. The proposed new control centre will be brought to Suffolk County Council's Cabinet for approval in September 2023.

Help for Suffolk Pre-payment Meter customers

A package of support has been created for pre-payment meter customers in Suffolk who are struggling with their energy bills. Warm Homes Suffolk is a Suffolk-wide Council partnership service, delivering energy efficiency support to low-income households affected by cost-of-living pressures. Supported by Suffolk's Collaborative Communities Board and funding from Public Health Suffolk's Contain Outbreak Management Fund (COMF), the service is now able to offer specific help for households struggling to pay their energy bills via a pre-payment meter, in addition to its existing support. The support covers the whole of Suffolk and is available for all residents, whether they are in social housing, council tenants, owner occupiers or private renters. The Warm Homes Suffolk Service can check eligibility and support applications for grants to increase household energy efficiency, with measures such as loft and wall insulation to air source heat pumps, draught-proofing and more. It is estimated that more than 24,000 people in Suffolk are pre-payment meter customers. The service will work with each individual to understand the pressures on their finances and the impact this is having on their lives. The service can carry out a home visit, as well as providing advice over the phone and by email. The COMF funding of £180,000 will enable this project to run for 12 months to provide the following:

Income maximisation (through grants and benefits); Budgeting advice; Help understanding bills and heating systems; Support to reduce energy expenditure (By promoting social tariffs and support to switch suppliers); Improving household energy efficiency (By installing insulation, draught proofing, heating systems and solar panels); Facilitating switch away from prepaid meters if appropriate. If you are struggling to pay your energy bills or know someone who is, please get in touch. Pre-payment meter customers who would like support can contact prepay@eastsuffolk.gov.uk to find out more, or call: Prepay West at 07769 365796, or Prepay East at 07769 366229. Referrals can be made directly from households, the voluntary sector and professionals to find prepay households who can benefit from an independent look at their bills. To find out more about the support on offer, visit: <https://www.warmhomessuffolk.org/>

£100m broadband investment in Suffolk under government's Project Gigabit

Better broadband is on its way for around 80,000 properties across rural Suffolk in a £100 million investment under a £5 billion government infrastructure programme. The county is one of three to benefit from Project Gigabit and was chosen to host the launch of the announcement by Minister for Data and Digital Infrastructure, Sir John Whittingdale. Similar projects were also announced for Norfolk and Hampshire as Sir John was joined in Orford by Suffolk Coastal MP Therese Coffey and Councillor Matthew Hicks, the Leader of Suffolk County Council. Project Gigabit is the government's £5 billion mission to roll out gigabit-capable, reliable broadband across the UK. Improved connectivity unlocks new opportunities and fuels innovation, supporting the Prime Minister's priority of growing the economy by creating better paid jobs. This project is managed by BDUK who in turn have contracted CityFibre to do the actual work of installing the cabling. CityFibre, the UK's largest independent full-fibre provider, will deliver gigabit-capable infrastructure for around 218,000 homes and businesses having secured £318 million of Project Gigabit funding after a competitive process. The provider will also be making a private investment of £170 million to deliver the project. Decisions on where broadband infrastructure is installed will be made by BDUK and not by SCC. Survey work commences immediately, with the first installations in the New Year and the first live connections expected by Summer 2024. Once connected, residents and businesses will enjoy access to broadband services over a network capable of supporting speeds of up to 10Gbps. As a rural county, we welcome the announcement of £100m for providing fast, reliable broadband to some 80,000 premises across Suffolk. This will build on our Better Broadband for Suffolk programme which has helped to deliver wider access to superfast broadband. Not only will this investment in our digital infrastructure help to keep our residents connected, but, since many of Suffolk's small businesses are operated from households across the county, it is essential for the future of the local economy."

Council to consider new chapter for library services

The current contract with Suffolk's Libraries Industrial and Provident Society (IPS), worth £5.92 million per annum, comes to an end on 31st July 2024. The Council now needs to consider how library services will be delivered following the expiry of the contract. The report to Cabinet recommends that a new Library Service contract is procured using a competitive tender process. To enable meaningful engagement, public consultation, and a competitive tender process to take place, the report also recommends that the current contract with Suffolk's Libraries IPS is extended by 10 months, to 31 May 2025. The public consultation will be used to inform the requirements and future development of the new service. Libraries play a vital role in our local communities – they offer so much more than books; providing community spaces which bring people of all ages together, to learn, socialise, read and take part in activities. Building on the good work already happening in Suffolk, we are committed to supporting library services, so that our residents continue to see the same high level of service from their local library. A competitive tender process will give us the opportunity to test the current market to ensure we are providing the best value for money for our residents. In May 2023, Suffolk County Council's Cabinet agreed to protect library services by providing Suffolk's Libraries IPS an additional £720k per year to address increases in service costs, until the end of the current contract. The proposal was put to Cabinet on 11 July to continue to fund Suffolk Libraries IPS at this rate for the duration of the proposed 10-month extension. The proposed value of the new contract will be £6.842m per year, considering the increased service costs and including an additional £0.2m for the Libraries Outreach Service. The proposed term of the contract will be 6 years, with the option to extend for a further 6 years.

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