

## **Report for Lavenham PC by Robert Lindsay, Suffolk County Councillor 6.6.24**

### **Funding for Local Government**

My group – Green, Libs and Independent - proposed a motion for council on Thursday 23rd May to lobby the government for improved funding for local authorities, which was seconded by the Conservative administration and voted through unanimously in the chamber.

Politicians of all parties are concerned by the £4 billion funding 'gap' predicted for councils in the next few years, particularly for social care. To balance the books this year, Suffolk County Council had to withdraw £15.9 million from its reserves, but this is not a sustainable approach. Councils that have become bankrupt have to cut services back to the minimum they have to provide by law, and seek to raise revenue by increasing council tax and other avenues they have such as charges for parking or social care.

### **Transport for Post-16 Students**

Cabinet also considered a paper on recommendations for charges for post-16 school transport.

Although students now have to be in education or training up to the age of 18, the council receives no funding from the government to pay for their transport. This means the council asks parents and carers to pay for part of the cost with the rest subsidised by the council. In 2023-24, the average cost for a "mainstream" seat was £1,701 and the average cost for a Special Educational Needs (SEND) student seat is £11,819.

The proposal approved by Cabinet was for the charge for a mainstream seat to rise to £1,050 a year, which is a steep £90 increase from last year. There will be no increase for SEND students so their seats will remain at £780 a year. The 50% reduction in charge for families on a low income and in receipt of free school meals will continue for another year.

### **SEND Strategy 2024-29**

A new SEND new strategy that takes on board recommendations from the recent Ofsted/CQC inspection to set the Partnership's direction for SEND services for the next five years.

The strategy was produced with input from children, parents, carers and members of staff who work in SEND services and aims to improve services in several areas where they have been criticised by inspectors: communication, outcomes for SEND children and improved timeliness and quality of Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) and Annual Reviews.

### **Nature survey**

In order to prepare Suffolk's Local Nature Recovery Strategy, the council has launched a public survey so residents can share their favourite nature spots and which habitats they think should be protected.

Farmers, landowners and land managers are also encouraged to submit practical, achievable proposals to support nature conservation, as well as sharing how land is currently managed and any challenges faced applying for government funding schemes.

The strategy will form a plan to help reverse the decline in nature across the county, and to connect and expand existing areas that are important for wildlife and the landscape.

You can share your thoughts in the Suffolk Local Nature Recovery Strategy Survey by visiting <https://www.nsnrp.org/get-involved>. It closes on 30 June 2024.