

Report for Lavenham PC 5 April 2018 – Robert Lindsay county councillor

“Community self-help”

I promised to update you on a meeting with Mark Stevens, currently most senior highways officer, on this. The survey that has been sent out, he says, has a twin goal. 1 of finding out what work is already being done by parish councils and whether SCC has legal coverage for it and 2. To find out if there is a desire for parishes to take on more work. He emphasised that only work more than half a metre out from the edge of the roadway would be considered. And SCC would need to approve any contractors to ensure they had right insurance, equipment etc.

Water Street Weight Restriction and other works

As you are aware I've written to Network Assurance about the various potentially conflicting jobs but as I write (Weds morning) have not had a reply. I have also written to Mark Stevens about what surveying is being done on Water Street so that the trial's effectiveness can be measured (should it ever get underway). He has asked the project engineer to reply. Meeting with Paul Gant at Lower Road next Thursday is still on.

Councillors denied debate on school transport

On 22 March, the Conservative majority at Suffolk County Council voted against a motion that would have allowed all councillors the chance to vote on the final school transport proposals, before the Cabinet makes a decision in June.

I am deeply disappointed that this motion did not receive the support of the council. It is very strange that Conservative councillors have denied themselves the opportunity to fully represent those who elected them.

New Chief Executive announced

Suffolk County Council has appointed a new chief executive, Nicola Beach, following a unanimous recommendation by the authority's Staff Appointments Committee and decision by the full council. Nicola, who is currently executive director of infrastructure and environment at Essex County Council, will join SCC this summer. Sue Cook will continue in her role as Interim Chief Executive until this time, when she will return to her role as corporate director of health, wellbeing and children's services.

Respublica commissioned to examine options for public sector reform in Suffolk

Cllr Noble, Leader of Suffolk County Council, announced that he has commissioned Respublica to look at public sector reform in Suffolk. The think-tank will clearly looking once again at the possibility of a unitary county council in Suffolk (scrapping the districts) although Cllr Noble has insisted that other options will be considered, such as East and West Suffolk unitaries, an option including a Greater Ipswich unitary council, or enhancing the existing two-tier system.

At full council I asked Cllr Noble who made the decision, how much it would cost and where the money was coming from. He said it would be £67,000, and that it was the decision of the Policy Unit which comprises him and the Chief Executive. County and district/borough councillors were not consulted, and the announcement has not been well-received by the leaders of all districts including Babergh.

Potholes – funding boost and rise in insurance claims

Potholes continue to be a key issue for councillors and residents alike. There are two significant updates this month:

Suffolk County Council receives cash boost to deal with potholes

Following the bad weather in February and March, Suffolk County Council has received £2.5m of additional funding from the Government to help with road repairs.

Suffolk Highways are encouraging residents to report potholes using the reporting tool (available at highwaysreporting.suffolk.gov.uk) and have already received over 11,000 reports in 2018. However, concerns have been raised by some councillors and residents who have been informed by the online tool that a pothole has been repaired, when in fact the work has not been carried out. If you experience this, please let me know so that I can inform the Cabinet Member for Highways of the problem.

Rise in insurance claims against Suffolk County Council

Insurance claims against Suffolk County Council due to “carriageway surface defects”, such as potholes, have risen in recent years, from 363 in 2013 to 647 in 2017. A total of 2239 claims were made in this five-year period, but 84.7% of these were successfully defended by the council. Despite this, between 2013 and 2017, Suffolk County Council paid out £226,432 in compensation and legal fees.

Suffolk County Council's gender pay gap remains significant

Suffolk County Council's pay report revealed that, although the Council employs nearly three times as many women as men, there is still a significant gender pay gap in favour of men. The County Council's mean gender pay gap is 14.8%. In other words, although Suffolk County Council employs relatively few men, they are over-represented in the better paid jobs and under-represented in the less well-paid jobs. This level is about on a par with other local authorities. It indicates that more needs to be done by Government and employers like SCC to make it easier for both women and men to work more flexibly, in senior roles. The comment by the deputy leader in full council that the gap was a “fact of life” and arose because “most women are naturally caring” demonstrates the engrained attitudes that need to be overcome.

Suffolk Waste Partnership awarded £10,000

The Suffolk Waste Partnership has been awarded £10,000 from the Government's Litter Innovation Fund, to run innovative local projects aimed at reducing litter.

The SWP plans to use the funding to:

- Trial new style litter bins at key layby locations and improve labelling and signage of litter bins along the A11, A12 and A14 in Suffolk.
- Trial new remote monitoring technology to help councils coordinate litter bin emptying more efficiently and effectively.
- Ensure that any person taken to court and convicted for a littering offence anywhere in Suffolk is named and shamed publicly.
- Run an awareness campaign