

Annual Report East Suffolk Council Norman Brooks

Been a very busy year following on from the turmoil of the Covid pandemic and the challenges this left us with.

Environment.

Continued to significantly reduce the carbon footprint of ESC by switching our vehicle fleet to use Biofuel and if vehicles not suitable replace them. Light vehicles and vans purchased EV's where practical.

Continue with works to improve our housing stock with improved insulations and carbon reduction schemes, and have actively encourage private landlords and house owners to follow suit.

Reduce energy demand from our leisure centres, with major refurbishments.

Continue with tree planting schemes across the district and encouraging grass verges to be seeded with wildflowers and reduce cutting.

Off shore wind farm service sector being developed in the Lowestoft docks.

Transport

Continue to improve the parking offer across the district with improved patrols and enforcement, whilst not increasing charges for the past 3 years.

Introduced 2 pilot demand responsive bus route schemes one in North of Lowestoft and one in Framlingham/Wickham Market area.

Third crossing across Lake Lothing at Lowestoft progressing well and on course to open late 23 early 24.

Coastal protections work in Lowestoft and coastal areas progressing well.

Cost of living

A new grant funding scheme has been launched in East Suffolk for voluntary organisations and community groups to help people struggling to meet the cost of living.

The East Suffolk Cost of Living Community Grant Fund has been set up with funding via the Suffolk Collaborative Communities Board, from the Suffolk Contain Outbreak Management Fund (COMF).

Funding is available to enable community, voluntary and social enterprise organisations, or town and parish councils, to support individuals and families who are struggling due to the current cost of living crisis.

The scheme is designed to help keep people warm, well-fed, safe and connected, with a particular focus on reducing incidents of respiratory conditions.

The fund will provide grants of between £500 and £5,000 for projects which support local residents struggling due to the rising cost of living.

In addition to the East Suffolk Cost of Living Community Grant Fund, the Council's overall Ease the Squeeze programme is worth more than half a million pounds.

More than £70,000 of the programme was invested in a network of 'Warm Rooms' across the district in a range of locations, including community and church halls, leisure centres and pubs.

Part-funded by the UK Government (through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund) and East Suffolk Council, with a number also funded from Community Partnership budgets, the sites will provide a warm space and tea and coffee, with free activities, ranging from books and games to film showings, also being planned and funded independently by venues.

Council Tax

We were able to keep the increase in ESC Council Tax rise to 2.8% without cutting or reducing any services. This was achieved with efficiencies and savings in the way we carry out our duties.

Community Partnerships

Another very successful year with all the 8 partnerships doing a great deal of work with the local representatives and producing some very good outcomes, such as funding community gardens, men's sheds, for example.

Employment

ESC was the lead authority on the bid to bring free port status to Felixstowe which I am pleased to say was successful and will bring in 1000's of jobs in the future. We were also able to access £25 million to help regenerate the Lowestoft Town centre and work will start very soon.

We have also worked with suppliers to install Fibre Optic Broadband right across the Lowestoft area and will be rolling this out across our other market towns next. This will encourage businesses to invest and new ones move into the area.

Tourism

ESC has spent large sums on extensive works to our seafront offerings in our coastal towns and we have plans for even more works to bolster our tourism industry.

CUSTOMER SERVICES & EXPERIENCE TEAMS

✓ During Covid, workstreams worked to reduce demand and free up capacity with Interactive Voice Response to inform customers of relevant service changes and divert resources as needed.

✓ Successfully managing on average over 175,000 phone calls and over 22,000 emails per year. Mostly around Council Tax, Garden Waste, and ESC tenant enquiries.

✓ During the pandemic over 2,000 vulnerable residents were assisted including 1,800 community referrals.

✓ Implemented a brand-new Customer Service Delivery Model (known as our One Front Door) – designed to be more flexible and making ‘every contact count’.

✓ Evolved our customer access and digital coaching approach and as a result we now have a presence in more locations across the district than ever before. We now operate 2 days a week in at the Marina CS Centre in Lowestoft, but also now in Aldeburgh, Felixstowe, Halesworth, Leiston, Saxmundham & Woodbridge Libraries.

✓ Delivering customer support to our Housing Repairs Teams. ✓ Updating and evolving our Marina Centre HQ in Lowestoft.

• COMMERCIAL PARTNERSHIPS

✓ Completed the £15m refurbishment and upgrade to our leisure centres across the entire district with the last to be delivered at Waveney Valley Leisure Centre in Bungay.

✓ Welcomed our new operating partner, Everyone Active, to the assets in the north of the district who compliment and add to the service provided by Places Leisure who operate in the south.

✓ Changing our contractual relationship and journey with Norse around waste collection, grounds maintenance and street cleansing by venturing out on our own with East Suffolk Services Ltd to ensure elements are firmly in place for 1st July. This council should be proud in the fact that it is our ambition to establish a true flagship commercial business organisation, delivering a quality service throughout East Suffolk.

• ICT & DIGITAL

✓ Delivered free public Wi-Fi to all our 12 market towns throughout East Suffolk.