

November 2023 report for the Thredling Division from Cllr Matthew Hicks

More than 200 properties flooded by Storm Babet

Interim figures show more than 200 properties in Suffolk were flooded by Storm Babet. The number of flooded premises, including businesses and homes, is expected to be higher as Suffolk councils and emergency planners work together to compile a full list. It is key that all residents who suffered flood damage report the incident. We know that this financial support is urgently needed, and we will do everything in our power to get it out to home and business owners as soon as possible.

The measures announced by government are:

- Flooded households in affected areas can apply for up to £500 to give cash quickly to help with immediate costs.
- Households and businesses significantly affected by recent flooding will be eligible for 100% council tax and business rates relief for at least three months.
- Small-to-medium-sized businesses in affected areas will be eligible for up to £2,500 from the Business Recovery Grant to help them return quickly to business as usual.
- Eligible flood-hit property owners will be able to apply for up to £5,000 to help make their homes and businesses more resilient to future flooding via the Property Flood Resilience Repair Grant Scheme.

The support will be made available through a scheme known as the Flood Recovery Framework, which is used in exceptional circumstances to support councils and communities following severe flooding. The full details of the scheme are yet to be announced by the Government, including where residents can apply and who is eligible. SCC and others will share updates once received. To report a flood please visit www.suffolk.gov.uk or alternatively, you can call the customer service number on 0345 606 6171.

I have spent time out and about supporting residents across my division since the arrival of Babet and again over this weekend as we had more rain. SCC as the lead flood risk authority is contacting all those who have registered on our website (or via the District Council) and will produce a Section 19 report as required. These reports are really important to look at what happened in each location, as this varies across our part of Suffolk and then what a solution might look like. This work is something I will keep track of and report back further as it unfolds.

It is often confusing as to which council does what so do visit www.suffolk.gov.uk where there are links to all those supporting our residents at this very difficult time.

Funding announcement for Ely and Haughley rail junctions

The Government has announced funding for upgrades to Ely and Haughley rail junctions. This is really excellent news for Suffolk. The infrastructure at these junctions currently lacks capacity for the demand from freight and passenger traffic. This investment will reduce those constraints and allow more trains to run through Ely and Haughley, including freight on rail out of Felixstowe and more passenger services between Ipswich and Peterborough. This will ease congestion on our roads, help us on our journey towards net zero by reducing carbon emissions and provide a significant boost to the local economy.

Council seeks your views for next year's budget

SCC is keen to hear from Suffolk residents, businesses and local communities, as it decides how it will spend money next year. An online consultation has been launched, and a number of focus groups will be held, to explain the council's current financial situation, along with the chance for Suffolk residents and businesses to have a say on Council Tax proposals. The council's budget setting process will take into account the responses to the consultation, advice from council officers, elected members from political groups, businesses and partners in health and other public service organisations across Suffolk.

Results of the consultation will be included in the report considered by the council when agreeing the budget in February 2024. Last year it gave us excellent insight into the public's priorities, with social care services for adults and children being high on that list. This aligned with the council's thinking, and we invested an additional £50m in these areas for this current year. The council's budget consultation helps to explain the council's finances, what it has been doing to save money, and how it can generate more money to spend on public services. The two main ways in which the council can increase the budget, are an increase in the money it receives from government, and/or through Council Tax. There are three key questions, the first is on which services people have recently used, the second asks for thoughts on seeking a greater contribution to Council Tax to help fund public services, and the third on which service area you would like to see more money spent. For years this administration has managed our finances well, and we have built up appropriate reserves to be able to see us through difficult times. We're facing those times now, but can only spend our reserves once, meaning our budget for next year will bring new challenges. We continue to lobby government, to demonstrate the challenges we are facing, despite our success making savings each year. To hear from Suffolk residents about the services they use, and their thoughts on Council Tax for next year, will be very helpful as we plan ahead. The online consultation closes on 4 December 2023, and can be found at www.suffolk.gov.uk/budget.

Suffolk Residents invited to help shape the future of library services

A public consultation has been launched encouraging Suffolk Residents to tell SCC what they want from their library services in the future. SCC's contract with Suffolk's Libraries Industrial and Provident Society (IPS) Limited, the independent charity that runs the library service, comes to an end on 31 May 2025, with a new contract set to begin in June 2025. The Council is therefore seeking views from the public about what is important to them, ahead of awarding the new contract. To inform the consultation, the council has undertaken engagement with over 30 organisations including Suffolk's Libraries IPS Limited staff, key service users, schools and partner organisations. A key focus of the consultation is the council's Library outreach services, which include three mobile library vehicles, serving more than 500 stops across rural parts of the county each month, for the pickup and exchange of books. The mobile library vehicles are coming to the end of their life and the council therefore needs to consider the best way to continue to deliver these services to people in rural areas of the county going forward. Library Outreach services also include Pop-up Libraries and a home library service, run by local volunteers, for Suffolk residents that find it difficult to access a library building or mobile library. The council is keen to hear from people who currently use library services and those who do not, to better understand the needs across the county. This feedback will help to inform the requirements for the future contract. The value of the new contract will be £6.8m per year, increased from the previous contract value of £5.9m. The increase takes into account increased service costs, management of the Library Outreach service, and to allow for innovation in future years. The term of the contract will be 6 years, with the option to extend for a further 6 years. Residents can have their say by visiting www.suffolk.gov.uk/LibraryConsultation. Those who cannot access the consultation online can request a printed copy or assistance with completing the survey by calling 0345 603 1842.

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