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Suffolk County Council Report September 2021

Afghan Refugee Support

Suffolk Public Sector Leaders have pledged their commitment to support Afghan Refugees as part of the Afghan relocations and assistance policy (ARAP) for families who supported and worked with the British Military and for the Afghan Citizen Resettlement Scheme (for those being evacuated).

Suffolk has already accommodated a number of households under the ARAP scheme and has pledged to increase this offer. SCC is working with District and Borough Councils to collectively discuss the increased

Many of you have been contacted by members of the public who are keen to offer donations to Afghan households. Because the numbers of people coming to Suffolk is very small at the moment, our officers have advised that there is no requirement for items to be donated at this stage. However, we are aware that this situation might change. Therefore, we have created a specific webpage on the SCC website which will allow us to communicate this message and direct people who wish to donate. Please direct any of your residents to this page in the first instance: suffolk.gov.uk/howyoucanhelp

Suffolk's first 'healing woods' locations announced

Four locations have been announced by Suffolk County Council as 'healing woods and spaces', which will offer people better access to nature and provide a positive legacy to the pandemic. The healing woods and spaces will be located in Bury St Edmunds, Combs & Little Finborough, Eye and Hopton.

The council's healing woods project connects with the motion unanimously passed by the county's councillors earlier this year, to commit to developing mental health support in Suffolk, in response to the impacts of the pandemic.

Research, such as that recently published by the University of Essex with The Green Light Trust, demonstrated that access to woodlands and green space can significantly improve people's wellbeing.

The four sites will develop unused spaces and existing green areas, to make them more accessible and offer dedicated places for peaceful reflection and a positive focus.

If you would like to propose a suitable site which could be developed as healing woods or spaces, email HealingWoods@suffolk.gov.uk

Protection for Suffolk's Blue Badge holders

The first of a number of 'enforcement days' has taken place in Suffolk, aimed at protecting genuine Blue Badge holders.

A Blue Badge is for the benefit of eligible people with severe mobility difficulties or severe non-visible disabilities, to enable them to park closer to their destination.

Blue Badge offences come under the Road Traffic Regulations Act 1984 which makes it an offence for a badge to be used for parking without the badge holder present and covers fake badges.

Certain offences can also constitute fraud and cases can be prosecuted in the Magistrates, resulting in a maximum £1000 fine.

Easing of restrictions when visiting Suffolk's Recycling Centres

Much like many other recycling centres across the country, Suffolk's Recycling Centres have been operating a socially distanced system during the pandemic. There have been some recent changes to the rules when visiting the county's recycling centres, but for now you will still need to book,

From Monday 16 August:

- An additional 4,500 slots will be made available per week, taking Suffolk's Recycling Centres to full capacity (weekly total to 27,422)
- Removal of one visit per week rule for household waste
- Trade waste will remain restricted to one visit per week (to ensure fair usage of the system which is mainly designed for residents' household waste)
- Cars with small trailers will now be able to book a 15 min car slot (750kg max gross weight, single axle and unbraked) and will also be allowed at Haverhill Recycling Centre.
- Cars with large trailers will now book a 30 min large trailer/van slot (over 750kg max gross weight, double axle or braked), apart from at Haverhill Recycling Centre due to its size.
- Vans without trailers will be able to book at all Recycling Centres (including Haverhill). Vans must book a 30 min van slot.
- Vans with trailers are still prohibited from using any of the recycling centres
- Social distancing will be removed from all sites. Cars can park next to each other (as directed by site staff) and restrictions on number of people on walkway/gantry removed.
- Staff will be able to assist visitors if requested. (All staff will wear FFP3 standard face coverings when assisting and follow good practice on Covid hygiene).
- More than one adult will now be allowed to unload per vehicle
- Guidance will remain for the public to continue wearing face coverings if possible. Face coverings for staff remain optional except when assisting the public

Suffolk County Council has begun the process of finding its next long term Highways Services partner to deliver key operational projects after the current contract ends on 30 September 2023.

The council is looking to develop a contract that utilises a blended 'hybrid' approach, enabling the council to enter into one contract that covers the majority of Highways Service functions and two contracts with specialist providers for streetlighting and traffic signals (ITS). The council will be looking for the new contract to focus on delivering greater social value, utilising local skills and talent, giving young people the opportunity to work in the sector as well as building on the council's commitment to carbon reduction and protecting the environment.

The whole contract development process will take just over two years to complete. Once the appropriate tender documents have been prepared outlining the council's requirements, initial advertisements will go out in December 2021. Discussions will begin with any interested prospective contractors in early 2022. Following such a rigorous tendering process, the council hopes to be able to award its chosen contract in early 2023 with the new service provider beginning in October 2023.

The procurement process needs to begin now to provide enough time to go to the market to seek relevant specialist companies which may be interested in tendering for the contract which is worth in the region of £800m - £1 billion over a projected 20 year period.

Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service adds four new enhanced appliances to its fleet, fitted with solar panels

Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service has unveiled state-of-the-art rescue vehicles and equipment to equip firefighters with the latest technology for rescues.

Four new "enhanced rescue tenders" will be based at Bury St Edmunds, Lowestoft, Newmarket and Princes Street (Ipswich), giving cover across the county and strengthening the emergency response across Suffolk's communities.

The new equipment and vehicles are also the latest innovations in green technology, supporting Suffolk County Council's climate emergency declaration and ambitions to be net zero by 2030. The fire appliances are the first in Suffolk to be fitted with solar panels, have more fuel-efficient engines and also carry battery powered hydraulic rescue equipment.

Suffolk homeowners can cut carbon emissions as successful solar panel buying scheme returns

Suffolk residents will be coming together once again to invest in renewables through a group-buying scheme for solar panels and battery storage.

Solar Together Suffolk, in conjunction with Suffolk County Council, helps homeowners feel confident that they are paying the right price for a high-quality installation from pre-approved installers.

This innovative scheme builds on three years of the highly successful Solar Together programme run in Suffolk. Since 2018, the scheme has installed solar panel systems in 1,028 households across the county. On average, homeowners have saved 33% on installation costs, £263 on energy bills in year one, and stopped harmful carbon emissions entering the atmosphere.

Suffolk residents have until 27 September 2021 to register their interest, for free and with no obligation, to join the group-buying scheme to have solar panels installed at their home. Not only does Solar Together Suffolk offer solar panels, but also optional battery storage and retrofit battery storage for residents who have already invested in solar panels.

How does it work?

- Until 27 September: Householders can register to become part of the group, for free and without obligation, at www.solartogether.co.uk/suffolk
- 28 September: Pre-vetted UK solar PV installers participate in an auction. They are able to offer competitive pricing as the volume and geographic concentration makes it possible for them to realise greater efficiencies, which they pass on with lower prices for installations.
- After the auction, registered households will receive a personal recommendation which is specific to the details they submitted in their registration.
- If they choose to accept their recommendation, the specifics of their installation will be confirmed with a technical survey after which a date can be set for the installation of their solar PV system.
- Telephone and email helpdesks are on-hand throughout the whole process which, together with information sessions, will allow households to make an informed decision in a safe and hassle-free environment.

Suffolk County Council brings Solar Together Suffolk to residents as part of the Suffolk Climate Change Partnership, on behalf of all of Suffolk's local authorities. This is in partnership with independent experts iChoosr to make the transition to clean energy as cost effective and hassle-free as possible.

Across the UK, iChoosr has delivered almost 5,000 installations to date and over 80,000 tonnes of avoided lifetime carbon emissions.

Suffolk plans climate change events ahead of COP26

With fewer than 100 days to the international COP26 conference, organisations across Suffolk are planning events to highlight the impact of climate change in the county, and what we can all do to slow it.

COP26 is the 2021 United Nations annual climate change conference. It is being held in November in Glasgow, hosted by the UK together with partners, Italy.

In the build-up to COP26, events around Suffolk will showcase local businesses and people who are tackling climate change, to inspire others to follow. The events aim to encourage businesses and residents to do more personally and professionally to reduce carbon emissions and therefore slow the increase of climate change.

One of the events confirmed to be taking place in Suffolk is the visit of the national Zero Carbon Tour, organised by Planet Mark. The Tour sees a fully electric 'Carbon Battle Bus' making visits around the country before arriving at the COP26 conference.

The purpose of the Zero Carbon Tour is to discuss the concept of net zero carbon and why it is critical for businesses. Suffolk's businesses, organisations and community groups will share their stories about how they have started their journeys to net zero. This will inspire and give confidence to those considering how to reduce their carbon emissions.

This event and others are taking place across Suffolk in the lead up to COP26, as part of Suffolk's collective campaign of Creating The Greenest County, and be net zero by 2030. As part of the Suffolk Climate Emergency Plan, these events look to encourage collaborative action by educating and engaging with residents and businesses to develop net zero journey.

Other events which are being planned in Suffolk in the lead up to COP26 include:

- ~~August/September – Webinars for Suffolk's voluntary sector (Suffolk County Council)~~
- ~~1 September – Zero Carbon Tour visits Ipswich~~
- 12 October – Ten Steps to Net Zero (Suffolk Chamber of Commerce)
- 21-22 October – Local Energy Showcase (Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Council)
- TBC October - A Greener NHS day
- 12 November – Greenest County Awards (Suffolk County Council)
- 23-25 November – Low Carbon Homes

All events are subject to change, visit www.greensuffolk.org for the latest details and information about starting your journey to net zero.

Annual Safeguarding report praised at cabinet meeting

The Annual Safeguarding report has been praised at a cabinet meeting this week. The report for the first time has taken "whole life" approach to safeguarding from children through to adulthood.

The report summaries the activity undertaken over the past year to safeguard children and adults in Suffolk and focuses on the impact that the the Covid-19 pandemic and accompanying lockdowns have had on the service. This report also informs plans to ensure the safety and wellbeing of adults and children in Suffolk as we emerge from the pandemic.

Throughout the pandemic, there was a concern that safeguarding needs may not be identified and reported due to reduced 'face-to-face' contact that children, families and vulnerable adults had with professionals, families, and friends, including those living in care homes. There was also a need to pay attention to the impact of social isolation and the changing risks of abuse.

The report highlights that as part of the Suffolk safeguarding partnership, staff worked with determination and creativity to introduce innovative changes very quickly and maintain the delivery of SCC's statutory responsibilities. This included developing new ways of working, communicating differently, changing referral routes, creating guidance, creating pro-active and preventative approaches in early identification of issues as they arise, and identifying new specific issues as they arose.

The report also identifies areas of focus in the coming year. Neglect remains a key challenge for children's services and for adults the number of self-neglect and hoarding risk assessments reduced, confirming concerns that the pandemic would impact on referrals of this nature. This will remain an area of focus with additional work to promote these issues, share best practice amongst the safeguarding partnership and increase face to face contact with people who self-neglect.

The emotional health and wellbeing of children and of adults will also be a clear focus over the next year. Provision will be redesigned and increased across the partnership to meet the new demands that have emerged as a result of the pandemic.