

## County Council Report from Peter Bellfield.

What news from the County Council in the past year?

The Council tax increase this year is the lowest ever, 2.45%, the 3<sup>rd</sup> lowest in the country, and compares with the Consumer Price Index rise of 3.2% and the Pension increase of 5.0%. The Council has made savings of £60m in the last three years and for this year we have budgeted for an additional saving of £12m. This has enabled us to put an extra £3.8m into safeguarding children and £1.1m into vulnerable adults. In addition, in the current economic circumstances, we are giving additional help to the Citizens Advice Bureau, Credit Unions and we are holding charges for non-residential care such as home care, day care, transport and meals on wheels.

Recently Government inspectors (Audit Commission etc.) have said that the County Council is the top performing County in terms of efficiency savings, the most cost efficient council in England and the best performing council for quality of service in the East of England. It is therefore not surprising that Suffolk is given a 4 star rating and “improving well”, the second highest classification possible. Even the reference library service has been up graded from 2 stars to 4 stars and excellent. While most of us can find areas of dissatisfaction with the council, these inspections do enable us to compare our performance with other councils and emphasizes the importance of having the highest quality of staff.

The subject which has been uppermost in the council’s mind in the past year has been the proposed changes in the organisation of Local Government. The Minister asked the Boundary Committee to produce proposals for a unitary council or councils in Suffolk. The latest, and we expect final, draft suggestions, which are out for consultation until 14<sup>th</sup> May, are one unitary council for the whole of Suffolk (a proposal supported by the County Council), or a unitary for Ipswich and Felixstowe and a separate unitary for the rest of Suffolk. Upon completion of consultation the Boundary Committee will report to the Minister its preferred option by the 15<sup>th</sup> July and she will announce the fate of Suffolk’s local government by the end of August. Meanwhile there will be County Council elections on the 4<sup>th</sup> June, but we do not know for how long we are being elected.

The schools reorganisation, where consultation with parents, governors and staff on the second phase of areas to change from the three-tier to the two-tier system, has been under way. As with the first phase it is proving controversial, particularly with those associated with the middle schools. Also you will have seen that the combining the two secondary schools in Felixstowe will take place to strengthen and broaden the educational offer in the town.

Last year I was pleased to help with the cost of security work and floor covering replacement for the village hall from my Locality Budget and should like to remind parish groups that their County Councillor can give financial support towards capital expenditure. However, do not expect very much as the Carlford Division only has £9,000 for the 26 parishes. This year the highways department has introduced a new scheme for funding minor road improvements which, in theory, gives discretion to your councillor as to how it is spent, but again the money does not go very far as I only have £12,000 for my division.

As always, please remember that I am here to help you with any difficulties you might have with the County Council. Do not hesitate to contact me and I will do all I can to sort out the problem.

21<sup>st</sup> April 2009