

A Report for Bures St Mary Parish Council Meeting on 16th September 2020

From James Finch – County Councillor for the Stour Valley

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This is a longer report than usual as we all try and face up to different challenges on our return to school and or the office after the last 5 months.

➤ **Preparations are finalised for SCC funded school travel for the new school term**

Suffolk County Council (SCC) have made preparations to ensure all pupils who are eligible for SCC funded school travel are transported to school safely for the start of term. SCC transports approximately 12,000 pupils, which is around 12% of the school population.

On 11 August 2020, the Department for Education published official guidance on the measures that need to be in place to ensure that school transport is COVID-19 safe. SCC have been working closely with bus operators and schools to put these into place.

There are three types of school transport that children travel on - either a dedicated closed contract, shared route, or public transport route. The guidelines for these routes are slightly different.

The majority of eligible pupils travel to school on dedicated, closed routes. This means that the vehicle only carries school children. On these routes, social distancing will not apply. There will be other measures in place to ensure pupils' safety. For example, children need to make sure they wash their hands before and after travelling, and no eating and drinking will be allowed on these vehicles. Face coverings are also recommended for children aged 11 and over.

Some children travel to school on shared routes. This is where most passengers are pupils going to school or college, but there are also a few members of the public travelling on the vehicle. SCC have worked closely with operators to ensure that there is enough space on these shared transport routes. Pupils should observe social distancing guidelines with members of the public and sit in the seats marked; they can sit next to members of their family or fellow pupils. On these routes, face coverings will be mandatory unless a child is exempt from wearing one, in line with guidance.

For pupils who travel to school by public transport, where routes are used mainly by the general public, social distancing will apply and face coverings will be mandatory unless the child is exempt from wearing one.

For pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) most of their routes are dedicated, so this means there is little change to their transport. Where changes are being made, we are getting in touch with the families to explain the arrangements for the new term.

A child must not travel on any of these routes if anyone in their household has symptoms of COVID-19, which are a new persistent cough, high temperature and/or a change in their sense of taste or smell. If the child or anyone in the household has these symptoms, then public health advice should be followed as usual.

Spare seats - *Planning school transport has been complex, as SCC has to plan transport across the three types of school travel routes. This involves, trying to predict how many fare-paying passengers there will be on shared and public routes. This has an impact on dedicated routes and how many spare seats will be available. We may need to use some of the spare seats for entitled pupils, but this will not be known straightaway. Therefore, spare seats will still be unavailable, to enable SCC to monitor capacity. Parents will be able to apply for spare seats from October half-term, subject to availability.*

➤ **Feedback form Chambers Buses**

I have been in contact with Jeremy Cooper of Chambers buses during August and am pleased to say that as from 1st September they were planning to re-introduce the full official timetable that should have started from 29th March, with one minor alteration to an afternoon 754 journey. Passenger numbers on their network were only about 35% of normal prior to the closure of Bures bridge, but the restoration of a normal service has been made possible by the provision of a rate per mile

payment from the Department for Transport known as “CBSSG”, as well as the gradual re-building of passenger numbers. Please encourage the use of these services.

➤ **Working together to ensure a safe start to the new school year**

This is an article by Councillor Mary Evans, Cabinet Member for Children’s Services, Education and Skills; published 25 August 2020.

“The start of the new school year can present challenges for families and schools alike. The prospect of walking back through the school gates for the first time since mid-March may feel both exciting and daunting.

COVID-19 has impacted on all of us in different ways and for many children and young people this has affected their education, with thousands not being in school for five months. Parents and carers across Suffolk have done a wonderful job educating their children at home. I thank them for all their hard work. It is important that we get children back into schools, nurseries, and colleges as it is the best place for their education and wellbeing.

While many children and young people will be looking forward to a full-time return, I know some families may be feeling anxious about the return to schools, nurseries and colleges; it could feel quite difficult for many children and young people. I would like to reassure them that we have been working very closely with schools to make sure safety measures are in place for the start of the new term. These include staggered start times, staggered breaktimes, increased hygiene and children remaining in consistent groups. These steps will all contribute to minimising the risk, while allowing teachers to get back to teaching children. Each school is different and will have put specific systems in place, based on individual risk assessments. School leaders will be in contact with parents prior to the start of term to advise on the arrangements. If parents do have any concerns, I would recommend they have a conversation with their school.

I realise that going back to school after weeks, indeed months, at home could feel quite difficult for many children and young people. It may take time for them to get back into a routine and adjust to life back at school. Children who continued to go to school throughout lockdown may also find it hard with the return of more children and a focus back onto academic work. Schools will work closely with children to listen to their concerns and help them make the transition back into the classroom and there is a wealth of helpful resources and top tips for parents on our website. For example, getting back into a routine can be a good way to prepare for the return to school. Bedtimes, waking times and mealtimes may well have changed during lockdown so adjusting these gradually to establish a routine to prepare children for the new school term will help them.

To access these resources visit; www.suffolk.gov.uk/children-families-and-learning/pts/if/five-tips/

In preparation for the start of term, we would also advise families to think about how children will travel to school as arrangements may be a little different. Families are encouraged, where possible, to walk or cycle to school, but I appreciate that this is often not possible. If children or young people use public transport to travel to school, we would advise families to check that their route is still running as some changes may have been made due to the pandemic. Families also need to take into account that, due to social distancing, there will not be as much space on the vehicle. If children and young people travel by public transport, they will need to understand whether they need to wear a face covering and how to do this safely, unless a child is unable to wear one for health, age, or other reasons.

The months out of school will doubtless have had a bigger impact on some pupils than others. We fully expect that there will be gaps in learning. The Education and Learning team at Suffolk County Council is committed in its work with all schools to help them bridge these gaps. Where parents have particular worries about their child's education and the impact of the lockdown, we would encourage them to talk to their child's school. Staff at the school will be best placed to offer advice about how individual children can be supported in the post-lockdown period, how learning topics can be prioritised and how parents can support their children.

I would like to thank leaders and teachers across the childcare and education sector for the huge part they have played in the COVID-19 pandemic response and their hard work in getting everything organised and ready for the start of term. I wish children and young people and all school staff the very best as they return for the new school year.”

➤ **Suffolk celebrates 1,000 miles of newly surfaced roads**

Suffolk Highways has completed its 1,000th resurfaced mile, following the Council’s commitment to relay new road surfaces on a quarter of Suffolk’s road network over 4 years. In April 2017, Suffolk County Council’s Cabinet committed to resurfacing 1,000 miles of road across Suffolk over a four-year period; in a bid to improve the quality of roads, reduce the number of potholes and to help stop potholes from forming in the first place.

The commitment also makes sound financial sense, as preventing the deterioration of road surfaces by machine surfacing or surface dressing helps reduce the need to spend more money on reactive maintenance repairing potholes now, and in future years. The 1,000th mile was laid at Horham Road in Eye on Tuesday 4 August 2020.

➤ **Suffolk and Norfolk businesses set for extra boost for apprentices**

Apprenticeships Suffolk and Apprenticeships Norfolk are launching a reward package, Recruit Retain Reward, providing £1,000 grants for businesses taking on new and/or redundant young apprentices, aged 16-24.

In a bid to give small and medium-sized Suffolk and Norfolk businesses as much support as possible, the project aims to offer a flexible ‘Apprenticeship Incentive Fund’ of £1000, giving businesses a boost to recruit their workforce for the future.

Employers who take on apprentices can experience a wide range of benefits. Developing apprentices’ skills to be relevant to the organisation, along with improved productivity, better quality of product or service, and higher staff morale are benefits highlighted by around three-quarters of employers. More than 8 out of 10 employers recommend an apprenticeship to others - *Data source: GOV.UK publications*

The new incentive scheme across Suffolk and Norfolk, will complement and enhance the new Government apprenticeship incentives announced recently by the chancellor Rishi Sunak (£2,000 for 16-24, £1,500 for 25+), and also the existing age incentives of £1,000 for 16-18s (19-24 with an Education Health Care plan).

In addition to the one-off financial payment, there will also be continued support for organisations who are new to apprenticeships. A collection of online resources is being created to support businesses employing an apprentice for the first time. This includes practical guidance and useful information from existing, local apprenticeship ambassadors to help add real value to the business.

It is hoped that the project, which is sponsored by the East of England Employer Ambassador Apprenticeship Network, will encourage apprenticeship starts across Suffolk and Norfolk, post COVID-19.

Apprenticeships Suffolk and Apprenticeships Norfolk provide an impartial service to all employers, providers, apprentices and stakeholders.

Further details of the project can be found here: www.apprenticeshipssuffolk.org

➤ Fostering and Adoption Sessions in the Stour Valley - Go Virtual



Regrettably all recruitment events based locally in the parishes have been cancelled due to Covid-19. *Since the incidence of COVID 19 sadly the demand for this service has increased significantly.* I am pleased to say that despite these sad circumstances the recruitment of foster parents and adoptees has also increased. Sadly the need is as vital as ever !!

Therefore, those who would like to find out more

- ❖ can refer to the website - <https://www.fosterandadopt.suffolk.gov.uk/> and / or
- ❖ join one of the following events during the next three months which will be conducted **VIRTUALLY** face to face with one of the team following the government guidance:-

For those wanting more information on Fostering only:-

Wednesdays - 2nd September, 7th October, 4th November 2020 - all 7:00pm in your home.

For those wanting more information on Adoption only:-

Thursdays - 3rd September, 8th October, 5th November - all at 7:00pm in your home.

To book a place **please email** Claire.Gwatkin@suffolk.gov.uk. She will then send instructions on how to join the virtual meeting. As always, our team will be happy to answer any questions you have about fostering or adoption! They normally will have a foster carer or adoptive parent available to help you too at these events.

Please spread the word.

➤ My Priorities

Education - Supporting Vulnerable People - Jobs and Growth - Localism and the Stour Valley - Building on Suffolk's Strength all underpinned by strong financial management and low council tax