Boxford Parish report by Robert Lindsay county cllr 29.9.26

Unitaries off the table – for now
My last report mentioned that Reform were judicially reviewing the decision to create three unitaries in Suffolk. Before their case was heard, the Government announced that they needed to review their decision in the light of "legal advice" and that meant that there would not be time to hold unitary elections in May next year as planned. Instead the long-scheduled district council elections will go ahead.
The Government insists they are still trying to create unitaries but have not provided any timetable. So that means people will be standing for district council elections not knowing the length of their term and county councillors who thought their term ended May 2028 will have to carry on for an uncertain period.
The whole thing looks like a mess, all because the Government tried to aggressively rush massive, complicated changes through, assured everyone one that their decisions were robust to legal challenge and then found out they were not.

Council warns of looming reserves crisis following Govt decision.
The council's latest estimate for the financial year has penciled in a £7.8m overspend for the year. The chief executive has written to staff warning that "if we continue as we are," this overspend would mean reserves would fall "below the minimum level required for safe governance of the authority." He highlighted that savings had become more imperative given the decision to delay LGR. One presumes that they were hoping that using up reserves wouldn't matter so much with only a short time left in existence.

School bus travel
TMS have doubled prices on their school time Central Connect service to Thomas Gainsborough School in Cornard. Two different parents have raised complaints with me. Unfortunately the county council's policy since 2019 is that families who choose a school that is not nearest do have to pay and are at the mercy of private bus companies who can charge whatever they want. I have raised this County Council who in turn have raised it with TMS. The only answer is to club together to pressure the company with withdrawal of their custom, or a rival service. Parents are circulating a petition to pressure the company.

Dunwich wildfire repercussions
After the wildfire, the Suffolk Fire Brigades Union wrote to the PM to ask for more appropriate kit. Suffolk currently receives lower than average funding from the government for its fire service, although it is one of the driest areas in the country and is therefore more likely to be hit by wildfires in our increasing hot, dry summers.

Suffolk's fire chief has told our Green group that they are currently in the midst of reviewing their needs in the light of the wildfire but that "it was already evident" that Suffolk fire service would need extra off road vehicles, wildfire-specific PPE and a dedicated "welfare vehicle" to support their firefighting crews at major protracted incidents. This is over and above what has been put aside in the budget for replacing what they have.

However, even if the service requests more investment, it may not get it from the county administration or the Government.

£18k on remodeling leader's office

The new Reform UK administration at the council is spending around £18,000 to remodel the Leader's office at Endeavour House, claiming these works were needed as there was not enough room in the current Leader's office.

Help to Replace Ageing Heating Systems

All Suffolk councils are partnering with Switch Together, a community group-buying scheme, to make it easier for Suffolk residents to choose installers to replace ageing gas, oil or LPG boilers with heat pumps. Through the government's Boiler Upgrade Scheme, eligible homeowners in England can receive a grant of £7,500 toward an air source heat pump, or £9,000 for households currently heating with oil or LPG. The grant is applied for upfront by the installer, so residents do not need to claim it back or repay it. Switch Together works by bringing residents together so that installers compete to win their business which secures better prices than homeowners could negotiate individually. Switch Together's group-buying savings apply on top of the government grant.
For more information about the scheme, please visit the Sustainable Suffolk website: https://sustainablesuffolk.org.uk/what-we-do/projects/switch-together-suffolk/

Public Consultation on Cuts to Healthy Child Service

Suffolk County Council's public consultation on proposed changes to its Healthy Child Service has been extended for an extra month. The proposed changes include cessation of the Young Person Pathway and Family Nurse Partnership, which provides specialist support to parents under the age of 21 after they have a baby. The proposals also include removal of the Community Staff Nurse role from Health Visiting teams, and the School Nursing service becoming term-time only. The consultation now runs until 18 October, with a decision likely to be made at Cabinet in November.

Further info: https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/consultations-petitions-and-elections/consultations/healthy-child-services-consultations

New food and recycling bins cut waste by a fifth

My group met recently with officers from the council dealing with waste, who provided us with some data on Better Recycling and how the roll out of waste collection changes had been going in the county since June. While household waste and recycling are collected by district and borough councils, Suffolk County Council is responsible for processing the waste. The weight of residual waste, which is waste that goes to in the black bin for the incinerator, has been cut by just over a fifth from 4,077 tonnes per week in April/May to 3,225 tonnes per week since June. Mostly this is due to food waste being collected separately and processed in anaerobic digestors. Over a year, that would be equate to a reduction of over 40,000 tonnes for all of Suffolk.

Care Leavers Winter Ball

Suffolk County Council acts as a 'Corporate Parent' to the children and young people who are taken into its care, and as many young people in care miss out on events like their school prom, the council is holding a Winter Ball for its care leavers on 27

November during National Care Leavers Month. The council is requesting donations of prom dresses, suits/formalwear, shoes and accessories and financial contributions towards the evening, and the Leaving Care service have set up a Go Fund Me so residents and businesses can donate. Donations of clothing, shoes and accessories can be dropped off at the Info Bar, Constantine House, Ipswich, IP1 2DX.

The link to the Go Fund Me site for the event is here: https://gofund.me/71c92855d