

Report from County Councillor M Evans for period May 2015/16

Locally, speeding traffic is still a problem. I have worked with the Police and Crime commissioner to ensure that one of the two new speed camera vehicles which been deployed to tackle speeding in rural Suffolk, is on patrol in this area.

The plan is that we will link up the deployment of the four vehicle activated signs I have funded for the Clare area with the speed camera patrols so we can provide a truly effective deterrent to speeding motorists.

We will be having a meeting in early June to discuss how best to organise the rota for the VAS machines.

Poor broadband speeds continues to be a challenge in some villages. BT is working on the second contract which takes high speed broad coverage to about 97% of the county. An independent firm, which wont need public funding, is looking at whether it can help in spreading the service to outlying rural areas.

A new broadband cabinet will be installed and operational in Wickhambrook by next Easter – but I haven't been told exactly where it will be located yet – as soon as I hear I will share that good news with you

In my past reports to you I have spoken about my concerns regarding two key county council services – education and highways and the need for us to perform better. I am pleased to report there has been really good progress over the last 12 months.

### **Education**

There has been a 4% rise in the number of pupils gaining five or more A\*-C grades, including English and Maths and Suffolk has risen 17 places in the overall league table.

77% of 11-year-olds achieved level 4 or higher in their SAT tests up from 73% in 2014.

Progress in Writing between Key Stages 1 and 2 is another area of improvement. The percentage of pupils making the expected progress rose from 89% in 2014 to 91% this year. The percentage of children making expected progress from Key Stage 1 to 2 in Reading and Maths also increased – with both seeing a 1% point rise. The increase in Suffolk was greater than the national rise.

I am especially pleased to report that the gap in performance between Suffolk's disadvantaged pupils and other pupils has also narrowed by 5% compared to a 1% increase nationally. We are committed to ensuring that our schools, while we retain responsibility for them, give all the county's children the best start in life.

Suffolk County Council's Children's Services has been rated GOOD by Ofsted which praised the work of the council in protecting and looking after children and young people. Under the tough new inspection regime, 78 councils have been inspected so far and no authority.

The team we have working in this area do truly vital work – protecting very vulnerable children and young people.

### **Highways**

Our new Assistant Director for highways Mark Stevens has wasted no time in knocking some long overdue common sense into how we operate the highways contract.

Mr Stevens, who joined us late last summer, has rationalised the way we work with our contractors so we operate as a team. Initially 180 SCC staff were placing orders with Kier MG – generating a vast swathe of bureaucracy. That has been cut back to a small team running the orders and payments.

We are focussing on maintaining the roads in good order rather than rushing about on costly repairs – this is much better use of funds. To surface dress a stretch of road can cost as little as £2.50 per square metre compared with a staggering £95 for rapid response repairs.

So Suffolk Highways will look to carry out between 50% and 100% more surface dressing this year than in the summer of 2015. It is a very weather-dependent treatment and is best done between April and August. However, if we have a wet summer, we will defer some of this major programme to 2017. Details of where we are looking to surface dress this year will be on our website shortly.

We are also going to undertake work on rural roads more sensibly avoiding the expense and inconvenience of road closures and lengthy diversions.

### **Devolution Deal announced for East Anglia**

Leaders from councils across Suffolk, Norfolk, Cambridgeshire and Peterborough and the New Anglia and Greater Cambridge Greater Peterborough Local Enterprise Partnerships have signed a devolution deal with the Government.

Details are still being discussed and it is not clear whether it will actually be ratified.

The proposal requires the creation of a Combined Authority and directly elected Mayor and it is proposed that the first mayoral elections would be in May 2017 alongside county council elections.

I am wary of creating anything which adds to bureaucracy and would much prefer to see more powers and funding coming down to parishes.