

COVID-19: SUPPORT PAYMENTS AVAILABLE FOR THOSE TOLD TO SELF-ISOLATE ON LOW INCOMES.

More residents on low incomes or benefits can now get financial help if they are told to self-isolate due to COVID-19 as Suffolk councils extend support payments to help more people. Previously Test and Trace Support payments could only be given to people meeting certain criteria, including on benefits. Now Councils across Suffolk have extended this, using their discretion, to help those on low incomes but not on benefits.

Councils across Suffolk are helping administer the Government grant scheme to help people remain at home and do their bit to reduce the spread of COVID-19. Details about the Test and Trace Support Payments can be found on District and Borough Council websites and how to apply for it. This is part of a range of measures that councils across Suffolk have introduced to support communities and businesses during the coronavirus pandemic, which includes the new Suffolk Support and Advice Service phoneline to help those facing financial difficulty. If you have been contacted by NHS Test and Trace and told to self-isolate on or after 28 September 2020, you are under a legal obligation to do so, and could be eligible for a £500 Test and Trace Support Payment.

COUNCILS LOOK TO SLASH FLEET EMISSIONS: Mid Suffolk and Babergh District Councils are considering proposals to cut their fleet's carbon emissions by up to 90% – supporting the councils' carbon neutral aims, by moving their vehicle fleet to Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil (HVO). The proposals form a major step in the councils' Carbon Reduction Management Plan, which sets out how net zero carbon emissions aim to be achieved by 2030. If approved, the move would see a significant reduction in pollutant emissions for the fleet, including up to a 90% reduction in CO₂. It would also support a circular economy, as the HVO fuel is produced from sustainable feedstock, including waste cooking oil. Currently, the councils' vehicle fleet represents 26% of the councils' total CO₂ emissions, approximately 880 tonnes per year. The fleet includes the councils' 35 waste lorries, as well as some vehicles used by the public realm and housing services. Moving to the new fuel will initially cost around £50k per council. An estimated further £56 - £97k per year, per council, over the next three years, will also need to be agreed to cover fuel costs. However, by using HVO, lower maintenance costs and longer engine life for the vehicles are expected.

LIGHTS, CAMERA, ACTION FOR 2021!: The new look Regal Theatre in Stowmarket is starting to take shape with the construction of two additional auditoria and a new café area in recent months. The Regal is benefiting from a £3.6m investment including a comprehensive expansion and refurbishment programme which will see it boast three modern cinema screens, improved audio-visual experience, as well as a new front of house, café and bar area. Works are also being undertaken to restore and preserve many of the original features of the existing building built in 1936. Despite the coronavirus pandemic, the project managers, Northmores, and the main contractor Mixbrow, have maintained progress on site with a significant proportion of the structures, electrics and utilities having now been installed. The final elements of the project including new seating, cinema screens and interior design features are due to be completed early in 2021. The Regal Theatre Project, being led by Stowmarket Town Council and Mid Suffolk District Council, will be a key attraction forming part of a wider vision for the development of Stowmarket. The project and the wider vision seeks to attract more visitors to Stowmarket who can enjoy the shopping, leisure activities, bars and restaurants on offer in the town.

GREEN LIGHT FOR EMERGENCY SERVICES HUB FUNDING: Mid Suffolk District Council recently approved £431,740 in funding from housing growth to progress plans for a shared Emergency Services Hub in Stowmarket – paving the way for collaborative working and enhanced 999 services.

RESIDENTS IN BABERGH AND MID SUFFOLK ARE SET TO BENEFIT FOLLOWING RECENT GOVERNMENT ANNOUNCEMENTS ABOUT ITS GREEN HOMES GRANTS: The Green Homes scheme, which is designed to help make homes more energy efficient, offers vouchers to households to get energy saving work done, and also invites councils to bid for funding to run home energy efficiency projects. A Suffolk consortium bid, including Mid Suffolk and Babergh District Councils, has been awarded over £1 million from the Department of Business Energy and Industry for five projects to be installed by 31 March 2021.

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