

Opinion

Councillor Keith Robinson



It's my great pleasure to become chairman of Suffolk County Council

I'm not very political. I got involved in local government because I wanted to do what I thought was right – to help people. My sense of self-worth comes from feeling like I can help to make a positive difference in the lives of the people in my community, not only in Lowestoft, where I live, but for all of Suffolk.

That's why it's my great pleasure to have been appointed as chairman of Suffolk County Council for 2023/24.

I've been involved in local politics since 2015, shortly after I was forced to give up my work as a mechanic and long-distance truck driver having lost all sight in my right eye when I hit my head at work. Not only that, but I have lost most of the sight in my left eye to a 30-year battle with diabetes.

I'm from a working background, so to be declared unfit to work was hard. Without anything to get up for in the morning, I started to become depressed. But that all changed during the 2015 General Election, when I visited Peter Aldous, MP for Waveney, and offered to help with his campaign. I like talking to people, so I thought I would enjoy getting out delivering leaflets and speaking to residents. This was my beginning in local politics.

After the campaign, I decided I wanted to get more involved, and eventually I stood and was elected to represent Oulton at Suffolk County Council in 2017. I also took over the Oulton Broad seat on what was then Waveney District Council later that year following the very sad passing of Colin Law. Of course, this has now merged with Suffolk Coastal, and from September 2020 until May 2022, I was chairman of the newly established East Suffolk Council.

Most recently, on May 25, I was elected as Suffolk County Council's chairman. Part of the chairman's role is to preside over meetings and uphold the county council's constitution, but it is also about much more than that. The chairman represents the council at civic and ceremonial events across the county. I have already had the honour of meeting Her Majesty Queen Camilla at a reception hosted by the British Sporting Art Trust at Palace House, Newmarket, on June 1, where she unveiled the trust's new painting by the artist Charles Church. The chairman also aims to encourage greater partnership working with private, public, and voluntary agencies. It is a neutral and non-political position. They are an ambassador and a



Councillor Keith Robinson, the new chairman of Suffolk County Council

champion for Suffolk.

The Chairman also chooses one or more charities to support during their term in office. The first charity I have chosen is Suffolk Accident Rescue Service (SARS).

For more than 50 years, SARS have been providing specialist volunteer responders to assist the ambulance service at the scenes of serious medical emergencies or trauma. These responders include anaesthetists, critical care paramedics and other clinicians, who are authorised to carry specialist drugs and additional life-

saving equipment not found on ambulances. Their skills and the additional equipment they carry give patients a better chance of survival.

I am also keen to continue promoting Lowestoft during my term in office, which is why I have also chosen to support Pathways Care Farm, which sits on a beautiful 13-acre site in the north of the town. Pathways is a haven of peace and quiet which helps vulnerable people by giving them a place to go and to work with others towards a common goal. Spending

some time here has an amazing effect on your wellbeing. It is a truly inspiring place that builds confidence, self-esteem, and teamwork.

Finally, I would like to take a moment to recognise the hard work of my predecessor, Cllr Robert Everitt, who raised more than £1,000 for his chosen charities: the Bury Deaf and Hard of Hearing Association and Gatehouse in Bury St Edmunds. Robert also introduced the county councillor awards, which are an opportunity for councillors to recognise outstanding contributions

being made by those in the community. I am pleased that these will continue during my tenure. Congratulations to Robert on his fantastic achievements.

When I lost my sight, I lost my sense of purpose. Since I was first elected six years ago, representing my constituents has given me a new purpose, and it is my great honour to continue to serve in this prestigious role.

Councillor Keith Robinson is chairman of Suffolk County Council