

January 2026

County Councillor's Parish Report

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Firstly, I wish you all a very happy and productive New Year!

Elections in 2026?

As most of you know the Government has postponed the Norfolk/Suffolk mayoral elections until 2028; they were supposed to be held in May 2026 but it has been considered that it would be best to delay these, though the reasons are not clear to all!

County Councils will be taken over by Unitary Authorities in 2028 as will District and Borough Councils in a unified council structure which will see between one and three Unitary Authorities to cover Suffolk, under the Mayoral Authority of Norfolk and Suffolk. The decision on the number of Unitary Authorities will be made by the government in March 2026 after the consultation period finishes. As you are aware the County Council has been promoting the single council option whereas the other Councils feel a three council option would provide better services as well as cost savings.

So, what about the County Council elections (which were already postponed in May 2025 for a year)? The government recently announced that they would allow County Councils to decide whether a further delay would be implemented so that there would be no need to re-elect Councillors before the Mayoral and Unitary authorities come into formal existence. Whilst this might be convenient (Govt. are arguing that elections may distract from local government reform work) and save some money, this leads to accusations that the main reasons are for political expediency and is certainly deeply undemocratic as Councillors who were originally elected for 4 years could serve for 7 years instead.

The Council has to let the government know what is our preferred option by 15th January and there is an Extraordinary Full Council meeting on 12th January to decide the Council's response, so I will be able to let you know the result by the next Parish Report.

Protecting Suffolk's Rivers

At Council on Thursday 11 December, my group proposed a motion to strengthen protection for rivers in the county via the Universal Declaration of the Rights of Rivers which include the right to flow naturally, be free from pollution or contamination and the right to recover from environmental harm. Councillors in the group and those from other groups at the council spoke passionately about rivers and the harm being done to them by sewage and agricultural and highways run off. Unfortunately, the Conservative group opted to vote against the motion and it was not carried. Other motions tabled at the meeting including writing to the government to protest the recent budget announcements, a motion criticising the council's record on Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and the importance of local Post Offices.

Suffolk Minerals and Waste Plan

At Cabinet on Tuesday 2 December, preparation arrangements were agreed for the county's Minerals and Waste plan, which is now five years old and due for renewal. The plan looks at the county's needs and decides what planning measures need to be taken to meet them – for example, aggregates such as sand and gravel which are necessary for housebuilding. As the government has announced high targets for housing in Suffolk, the amount of these materials needed will be higher than before. As the Local Government Reorganisation process means that Suffolk County Council will likely not exist by the time

the plan is due to be adopted, the decision made by Cabinet was to undertake all the prep work and gather evidence for it so that the new authority/ies who have to publish the plan will be well-placed to do so once established.

Review of SEND progress

On Thursday 4 December, the council's Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Committee convened to scrutinise progress on the action plan for improvement to Suffolk's Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) services. The action plan was developed following a poor inspection report from Ofsted and CQC in November 2023. Council officers and Cabinet members for children's services joined the meeting and acknowledged that although progress had been made to clear the backlog of EHCPs and improve the waiting times to produce them and review them annually, many families had not yet felt the benefit of improvements the council and health partners were trying to embed. The Cabinet member for Education and SEND apologised at the meeting for this. It was noted that some issues, like the shortage of speech and language therapists, were a national issue rather than specific to Suffolk. The council is also working closely with the Department for Education and in partnership with Bedford Borough Council on best practice and support with strategy. The government's Schools white paper, which is expected to include an overhaul of the SEND system nationally, is expected soon in 2026. Members of the committee included education professionals and parents of children with special educational needs who expressed their concern that the council was still not providing a good enough service to Suffolk families.

New Funding for Buses and Sustainable Travel

Suffolk has been awarded £27m of funding for bus services from the government's Local Authority Bus Grant (LABG), this can be used for routes, ticketing or improving infrastructure like bus stops and shelters. Previously known as the Bus Services Improvement Grant, communities in Suffolk will be able to suggest improvements in their area and 'bid' for funding via the Suffolk on Board website: <https://www.suffolkonboard.com/>

The council has also been awarded just over £12m from Active Travel England to promote sustainable travel in the county. This can be used to invest in footpaths, cycle lanes and other infrastructure. Examples of how this funding has been used recently include pedestrian crossings in Bridge Street and College Road by Ipswich waterfront and improved cycle routes including from Ipswich Hospital to the waterfront area, Nacton Road in Ipswich, Main Road in Martlesham, and within Woodbridge as part of the town's current active travel project. Cllr Chris Chambers, the Cabinet Member for Transport Strategy at the council, said it was important for the council to develop a network of measures to encourage people out of the car wherever possible in order to reduce congestion and pollution.

Warm Homes in Suffolk

At the end of November 2025, Suffolk County Council secured £1.38 million from the government's Warm Homes Local Grant Fund, which means Suffolk residents living in properties which are not energy efficient could be eligible for funding to make their homes warmer and reduce their energy bills. Residents and landlords are urged to apply quickly, as the funding must be allocated by the end of March 2026.

The fund aims to provide free energy saving improvements to energy inefficient homes if residents are on a low income, receive certain benefits or live in a certain postcode area. This could be wall and loft insulation, solar panels or air source heat pumps. To be eligible, Suffolk homes must be privately owned (either by you or your landlord) and have an Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) of D, E, F or G (you can find this out when you apply). Household income must usually be £36,000 a year or less - but if you earn more than that, you might still be eligible if either:

- you live in a certain postcode area (certain areas of Beccles, Felixstowe, Ipswich, Lowestoft and Stowmarket)
- someone in your household is getting certain benefits
- you have a severe or long-term health condition, which is adversely affected by living in a cold home

Once these conditions have been approved, an assessment of your home will identify which measures

are best suited to your property. These will then be installed by trusted contactors, for free. You can find out more and apply using this link: <https://www.warmhomessuffolk.org/>

In addition, Suffolk County Council and East Suffolk council have teamed up to provide Winter Warmth Packs to help vulnerable residents stay warm and healthy at home even if they are struggling with rising living costs. Referrals are via community groups, food banks, GP surgeries or hospitals and each pack includes items such as thermal hats, gloves, blankets and gilets, tailored as necessary – for example, children's winter coats can be included. Although the Warm Homes Healthy People programme is delivered by East Suffolk Council, it is a county-wide programme.

Helping Older Drivers Stay Safe

Suffolk's Fire and Rescue Service are holding workshops at fire stations around the county to advise older people on how they can stay safe while driving. Nationally, one in four car drivers killed on the roads last year were aged 70 or over, and as a rural county, many residents are reliant on cars to stay independent. The sessions are planned at the following venues for 11am-1pm:

- Tuesday 13 January – Woodbridge Fire and Police Station
- Wednesday 14 January – Stradbroke Fire Station
- Tuesday 27 January – Wrentham Fire and Police Station
- Wednesday 28 January – Ixworth Fire Station
- Tuesday 10 February – Holbrook Fire Station

To book a free place, please visit <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/o/suffolk-fire-rescue-service-road-safety-86298781223?msockid=1b58e35a30906c973b40f56031016d19>

Social Media and Helpful Links

Follow us on:

Twitter - [@SuffolkGLI](https://twitter.com/SuffolkGLI) / Twitter

Instagram – https://www.instagram.com/suffolkgli_group/

Facebook - [Suffolk GLI - Green, Liberal Democrat & Independent Group | Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/SuffolkGLI)

Website - [Suffolk Green, Liberal Democrat and Independent Group – The GLI Group at Suffolk County Council \(suffolkgli.wordpress.com\)](https://suffolkgli.wordpress.com)

Cost of Living help and

advice: <https://infolink.suffolk.gov.uk/kb5/suffolk/infolink/family.page?familychannel=6>

Benefits advice and

support: <https://infolink.suffolk.gov.uk/kb5/suffolk/infolink/adult.page?adultchannel=0>

Flood preparation advice: <https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/suffolk-fire-and-rescue-service/fire-and-rescue-safety-advice-in-the-community/what-to-do-in-a-flood>

<https://suffolkprepared.co.uk/get-prepared/risk-advice/flooding/>

Flood recovery advice and support: <http://www.suffolk.gov.uk/about/flood-recovery-information-for-suffolk>