

Cllr Elaine Bryce
Suffolk County
Councillor
for Carlford Division

December 2025

Parish Newsletter

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Parents and carers have until Thursday 15 January 2026 to submit an application to secure their child's place at a primary, infant or junior school for September 2026.

New heating solution for central Ipswich

Suffolk County Council has been leading on the feasibility of a heat network project since 2021, and has now secured £10 million from the government's Green Heat Network Fund to make it a reality.

"The project will work by harnessing natural occurring heat from the River Gipping, and delivering the energy to buildings across Ipswich."

Councillor Richard Rout, Suffolk County Council's Cabinet Member for Devolution, Local Government Reorganisation and NSIPs

Heat networks using renewable energy have the potential to heat homes and workplaces in a way that improves local air quality, reduces carbon emissions, and, as part of a wider package of measures, delivers secure and affordable energy.

Councillor Richard Rout, Suffolk County Council's Cabinet Member for Devolution, Local Government Reorganisation and NSIPs, said:

"This will be a significant project for Ipswich, one which the county council is proud to have been leading on for a number of years, and has now secured a successful funding bid.

“By taking energy from the River Gipping, there is the potential to provide over 35 GWh of heat each year to public buildings across Ipswich – enough to power around 40 buildings in the first phase, ranging from offices to community buildings.

“We have been in discussions with a number of potential beneficiaries, and the first buildings could be connected as early as 2028.

“This can deliver hugely positive upgrades to the town: affordable energy for businesses, protection from volatile energy markets, jobs and growth for the local economy and placing Ipswich as one of the country’s forward-thinking towns when it comes to ensuring local energy security.”

As part of the project, the county council will be continuing to work with local colleges and the university to support the development of green skills locally, offering vocational and academic training and qualifications in the district heating sector, and supporting over 50 local jobs.

Learning from the project will then allow the potential for expansion of the network in other parts of the town, as well as other locations in Suffolk.

The county council is committed to working through the shared Suffolk Climate Emergency Plan, helping to deliver cleaner power and supporting local industry and commerce in the local public and private sector – delivering for residents, the community and environment.

Suffolk Fostering Christmas film highlights what it means to belong

With the need to recruit more foster carers as pressing as ever, audiences will be introduced to a moving new film that captures the essence of family, tradition, and hope.

The film’s story follows a young boy as he joins his foster family in the annual tradition of selecting and decorating their Christmas tree.

Among the twinkling lights and handmade ornaments, he discovers family photographs from years past – something that leads him to reflect on his own journey and sense of belonging. Observing this, the foster carers’ daughter offers him a heartfelt gift, an act of kindness that restores his hope and affirms the warmth of acceptance.

With its poignant narrative and festive backdrop, the film is a celebration of resilience, compassion, and the enduring spirit of the festive season.

“We believe every child deserves a place where they can truly belong – and it’s a responsibility we all share to make sure they’re given the very best start in life. By choosing to foster with your local council, you help keep Suffolk children close to the people, places, and communities they already call home. You can give a child a place to

belong, to grow and to thrive.” Cllr Bobby Bennett, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People’s Services

Through initiatives that champion care, compassion, and opportunity, Suffolk County Council continues to work towards a future where every child feels valued and supported. This new film serves as a reminder that belonging is at the heart of hope – and through fostering, we can help make that hope a reality.

The filming location was provided by Rougham Estate, while Offset Films produced the film. **Simon Eddell, Estate Manager at Rougham Estate, said:** “It’s a small contribution, but one that we are delighted to be part of in order to raise awareness of a significant cause. We hope it helps many children.”

To find out more about fostering with Suffolk County Council, visit: www.fosterandadopt.suffolk.gov.uk

Inspectorate satisfied with Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service’s improvement progress

In a letter received this week following an October revisit, inspectors recognised early positive change across leadership, governance and organisational culture, supported by a comprehensive action plan developed with staff and representative bodies.

Inspectors also noted the significant investment and support from Suffolk County Council - totalling £1.6 million over two years, which has enabled new posts, development programmes and organisational reforms to be put in place.

While acknowledging that meaningful cultural improvement takes time, the inspectorate confirmed it is satisfied with the service’s progress to date.

Jon Lacey, Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service’s Chief Fire Officer, said:

“We welcome the inspectorate’s recognition of the progress made so far, which reflects the hard work and commitment of our staff and leaders.

“We are building a positive, inclusive and values-led culture, and while we are encouraged by this feedback, we know we are only partway through our improvement journey.

“Our focus now is on continuing to embed change, strengthening leadership behaviours, and ensuring that improvements become sustainable and consistent across the organisation.”

Since the inspection last year, Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service, has:

- Secured £1.6m investment from Suffolk County Council to support improvement.

- Recruited nine new posts, with eight further roles in progress.
- Developed a comprehensive 37-goal improvement plan addressing all recommendations.
- Introduced new governance boards and improved oversight of progress.
- Delivered leadership development, training and 360-degree feedback programmes.
- Increased staff engagement through surveys, feedback processes and enhanced internal communications.
- Commissioned external peer support and challenge to promote learning and transparency.

Councillor Steve Wiles, Suffolk County Council’s Cabinet Member for Public Health and Public Protection, said:

“It is reassuring to see the Inspectorate recognise the meaningful progress being made.

“The council’s £1.6 million investment is supporting improvements in leadership, communication and culture, and it is encouraging to see positive change emerging.

“There is more work ahead, but strong foundations have now been put in place, and we will continue supporting the service as it delivers the high standards our communities expect.”

To read the letter from HMICFRS in full, please visit: [Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service: Cause of concern revisit letter - His Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services](#).

Hidden batteries could spark Christmas chaos: How you can stay safe

Items such as toys, power tools, vapes, small gadgets and even Christmas cards can contain hidden batteries, and sometimes it is not possible to remove them.

If these items and their batteries are not disposed of correctly, they can explode and cause huge blazes at recycling centres and waste transfer stations, or even at home.

The warning comes from Suffolk County Council, FCC Environment and Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service, in order to prevent avoidable fires.

To keep safe this Christmas, the messages are clear:

- Do not put batteries or items containing batteries in any of your bins at home
- Take them to the battery recycling point at your local recycling centre, or local shops – [use the battery recycling locator](#) to check your nearest location
- If you are unsure if your item contains a battery, do not throw it in any of your bins at home, take it to your local recycling centre for experts to check

**“Incidents can also delay bin collection services, reduce opening hours at recycling centres, or even close them – and this time of year, is when the industry is at its busiest.”
Councillor Chris Chambers, Suffolk County Council’s Cabinet Member for Transport Strategy, Planning and Waste**

FCC Environment operates 11 recycling centres and three waste transfer stations on behalf of Suffolk County Council, and has seen a sharp rise in the number of fires fuelled by wrongly disposed batteries and electronic items.

In April, a battery sparked a fire at FCC Environment’s Red Lodge site near Newmarket which took eight days and 660,000 litres of water to extinguish, causing £60,000 of damage.

FCC Environment’s Suffolk Recycling Contract Manager, Paul Smith, said:

“Hidden batteries start real fires, and we’re urging residents across Suffolk to take care this Christmas and dispose of batteries and items at local battery recycling points across the county.

“If not recycled properly, subsequent fires endanger the lives of recycling centre staff, firefighters and local residents.”

Councillor Chris Chambers, Suffolk County Council’s Cabinet Member for Transport Strategy, Planning and Waste, said:

“We’ve seen first-hand in Suffolk how incorrectly disposing of batteries can pose a danger to the environment and local communities.

“Incidents can also delay bin collection services, reduce opening hours at recycling centres, or even close them – and this time of year, is when the industry is at its busiest.”

Statistics from the National Fire Chiefs Council suggest that there were over 1,200 preventable battery fires across the UK in 2023, up by over 70% from 2022.

Lee Wilkins, Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service’s Group Manager for Prevention, Community Engagement and Partnership Working, said:

“Fires caused by batteries in recycling centres are completely avoidable. By removing batteries from items before disposal and following the guidance provided, you can help prevent dangerous incidents and keep our communities safe. Please take that extra moment - it really does make a difference.”

For more information about recycling batteries and other items, visit www.suffolkrecycling.org.uk

New Sizewell C skills bursary open to applications

Managed by Suffolk County Council, the bursary is designed to remove barriers to training and employment, ensuring that local people can gain the skills needed for Sizewell C and other high-quality jobs in the county.

The fund will provide £15,000 every year for the next decade, with individual bursaries of up to £1,000 available. Applications must be supported by the learner's training provider. The bursary can help with essential costs such as travel, accommodation, childcare, specialist equipment, study materials, PPE or uniforms, and short upskilling courses not funded by government, like a CSCS (Construction Skills Certification Scheme) card.

Full details of eligibility and how to apply are available at <https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/business/supporting-employers-training-your-workforce/sizewell-c-skills-funds>

CLlr Richard Smith MVO, Suffolk County Council's deputy leader and cabinet member for finance, economic development and skills, said:

"We want Suffolk residents to be first in line for the opportunities Sizewell C will create. This bursary will help to ensure that local people – especially those from areas with greater deprivation – have the chance to train for skilled, well-paid jobs that will strengthen our local economy and benefit communities for years to come."

Suffolk County Council welcomes Landmark House sale to Suffolk Police

Councillor Joe Mason, Deputy Cabinet Member for Property and County Farms

said: "Today's decision is very good news for residents. It supports improved policing services while helping the county council continue to manage its office estate efficiently and deliver value for taxpayers. We will keep working closely with the Police and Crime Commissioner and Suffolk Constabulary to ensure a smooth transition and minimal disruption for staff and the public."

Suffolk's Police and Crime Commissioner, Tim Passmore, said: "We have part-owned Landmark House with the county council for many years and when the council made the decision to sell it made sense to purchase their share."

"This additional space will help address concerns about the poor state of the CCR accommodation raised by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Service during their 2023 PEEL Inspection."

Suffolk Constabulary’s Chief Constable, Rachel Kearton, said: “This development forms part of our ongoing journey of transformation of contact management with the public and I am grateful for their support as we continue to improve. It’s also important our communities recognise we will strive to do the best we can to continue to provide a police service they can be proud of.”

Suffolk secures more than £26 million bus funding over three years

Millions of pounds of investment is to take place in Suffolk’s bus network over three years following allocation of Government funding.

Services, ticketing, and infrastructure will all benefit under the package worth nearly £27 million between 2026 and 2029.

Suffolk County Council will receive a total of £26,813,760 under the Local Authority Bus Grant (LABG).

This funding will enable the continuation and expansion of new and improved services introduced over the past two years through LABG support and its predecessor, the Bus Services Improvement Grant (BSIP), many of which were shaped by community feedback.

Suffolk will receive:

- 2026/27 - £8,849,119
- 2027/28 - £8,937,920
- 2028/29 - £9,026,721

The funding is split into two areas.

Revenue investment will focus on:

- Maintaining and growing enhanced services based on local suggestions.
- Increasing publicity and travel information to help residents make informed choices.

Capital funding will deliver:

- Renewal and expansion of Real Time Passenger Information across Suffolk.
- Improved ticketing options and accessibility in partnership with bus operators.
- Investigations into bus priority measures to reduce journey times and encourage modal shift.
- Upgraded bus stops with new shelters, better footway links, and accessibility enhancements—many suggested by local communities.

Local authorities will have flexibility to use LABG funding to meet local needs—whether by reducing fares, introducing new routes, investing in zero-emission buses, or improving bus stops and stations.

Councillor Chris Chambers, Suffolk County Council Cabinet Member for Transport Strategy, said: “Certainty of funding allows Suffolk to work with operators on multi-year plans to transition to electric buses, improving air quality in town centres and ensuring more reliable operations.

"With guaranteed funding in place we can deliver the improvements our communities have asked for—better services in our towns and rural areas, and more accessible stops. “This investment will help us make bus travel a more attractive, reliable, and sustainable choice for everyone."

Last July Suffolk County Council announced a £2.8m investment in new bus routes and improved services following announcement of LABG funding of £8 million for 2025-26. As well as new routes, some services gained increased frequency and a Sunday schedule added.

Alongside the £2.8m revenue for delivering new or enhanced services, the county council also [previously announced £5.2m of capital funding from the DfT](#) for new and improved bus stops, bus stations, bus priority measures or vehicle upgrades.

For more details of public transport in Suffolk go to the [Suffolk On Board](#) website.

SEND data shows improvement, but impact not felt by everyone, committee hears

The progress of improvements to special educational needs and disabilities provision in Suffolk was discussed at Education Scrutiny Committee on Thursday <4 December>. The committee, made up of councillors from all parties and non-elected independent members, such as parent governors, quizzed health and county council leaders on the progress, plans and challenges within SEND reform. The last time SEND was discussed at Education Scrutiny was June 2024.

Progress reported to the committee included:

- Significant improvement in the timeliness of Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs). By January, timeliness will be well above the national average of plans issued within 20 weeks. (Approximately 50% compared to 3.8% November 2023)
- Issuing more Education, Health and Care Plans than ever before. In November, 364 plans completed, compared to 186 November 2024. An increase of 65%.
- The timeliness of Annual Reviews has also improved, with 892 completed in November - compared to 775 last November

The committee also heard how the Department for Education continues to monitor and track improvement. The results of a recent stocktake visit by officers from the Department for Education is due shortly.

Despite positive evidence, officers were clear that improvement is not yet being felt by all families and reiterated that a robust, detailed and deliverable plan remains in place to keep driving reform at pace.

Acknowledgement was given that work to improve SEND is complex and costly, working across many sectors and against a backdrop of a broken national SEND system. Suffolk also faces rising demand with an increase of 22% more Education, Health and Care Plans over the year.

Discussions also included the caseloads of staff, appropriate training including staff visiting education settings and recent investment in staff recruitment.

Cllr Keith Robinson, chairman of the Education Scrutiny Committee, said: “It is right that the complexity of Suffolk's SEND reform is scrutinised by the committee.

“It is clear that progress is being made and there is enthusiasm and dedication shown by officers to improve the way services are delivered. What is important now is that this improvement continues and its impact is felt by all children and young people.”

Sue Willgoss, chair of trustees for the Suffolk Parent Carer Forum, a statutory co-production partner, told the committee: “We welcome SEND reforms but the delay is challenging. We know timeliness is getting better, but our fear is then the quality is not what it should be or not improving alongside it.

“It is important to work at pace, but really important for that change to be meaningful and of a quality that makes a difference to families, children and young people. Once they are and they make positive change, those changes need to be embedded, so we don't come back around, yet again, to the same old problems.”

Reform of SEND is being driven by the Local Area Inclusion Plan, which is delivered by the SEND Local Area Partnership made up of Suffolk County Council, the NHS Suffolk and North East Essex Integrated Care Board (ICB) and NHS Norfolk and Waveney ICB, and education settings. There are five priorities; belonging and inclusion, quality of Education, Health and Care Plans, access to provision, preparation for adulthood and engagement and communication.

Cllr Andrew Reid, Cabinet member for Education and SEND at Suffolk County Council, said: “I am grateful for the opportunity for SEND services to be scrutinised in such detail.

“The data and evidence show positive trends and improvement, but we recognise that there is more work to do. Improving the way we deliver SEND services remains our top priority and we will not deviate from our strict timeframes. We are committed to transparency, co-production and continuous improvement, as evidenced by the breadth of data and oversight arrangements in place.”

The committee will now agree a set of recommendations. The papers are available to view [here](#).

OPINION: Ipswich Northern Route - If Jack Abbott Wants Progress, He Should Start by Turning Up

It's often said that nothing is certain in life except death and taxes. It's pretty much true, especially in Labour's Britain of today where taxing people has become this government's favourite past time.

What's also become somewhat of a certainty is that Ipswich MP, Jack Abbott, will write something publicly he thinks is positive, pretend he's done all the work to deliver it, blame everyone else when things go wrong, and then vanish until the next time he feels the need for a local headline or two. His opinion column of last week was an example of this.

The Conservative-led county council is the only authority that has taken a serious look at the Ipswich Northern Route (INR).

We explored multiple route options, carried out a full and extensive public consultation, and ultimately had no choice but to shelve the project. Why? Because there was overwhelming public opposition along every proposed route, district councils refused to commit to the 15,000 homes needed to demonstrate economic benefit, a non-negotiable requirement for government funding, and the county council simply didn't have the hundreds of millions required to build the road without government investment.

Jack is right to say that in July the county council backed a Labour motion to revisit the northern route, alongside other projects aimed at improving traffic flow in and around Ipswich, but he is entirely wrong to suggest nothing has happened since that vote, far from it. In reality we have been working with strategic partners to pull together the plans necessary to properly re-examine a range of solutions, including a northern route.

In October, the Suffolk Chamber of Commerce brought together political leaders, senior policy advisers, and key stakeholders for a focused discussion on how Suffolk can work collaboratively to tackle traffic challenges. The goal? To identify solutions for investigation and funding that address capacity and resilience issues on the A14 and Orwell Bridge. That meeting produced an action plan with several critical steps that must happen before we can realistically revisit potential northern route options.

Why is this important? Because building a northern route isn't without problems or human impacts. Let's be clear: the anguish faced by those whose homes and villages would be affected cannot be brushed aside as collateral damage for the sake of easing tailbacks or gaining political headlines. Before reopening the wounds of 2019, we need to be certain that any route has genuine political backing and the funding to make it viable. If the same blockers remain, we'll end up with the same result as last time – and that means nothing but pain and disappointment for everyone involved.

Jack was invited to the October meeting but didn't attend and just sent someone along to take notes. Why? I've no idea. What I do know is that I was there, along with other representatives from across Suffolk. Some of the discussions at that meeting needed MP involvement, and several actions were specifically assigned to MPs with support from the Chamber of Commerce. The tasks relating to the INR for Suffolk's MPs were clear and straightforward, so I'll summarise them here for transparency – and I'll also write to Jack directly. I'd hate for him to miss them again.

Jack's Ipswich Northern Route To-Do List

1. Speak to the Department for Transport and confirm whether the government still requires significant housing delivery and/or match funding before considering any Ipswich Northern Route project.
2. Gain district council support: Can you persuade local council leaders such as Caroline Topping, who currently oppose any route, to support a road through their districts?
3. Clarify funding expectations: Will the government still demand 15% of the total cost from local councils?

In July, I made it clear that the new mayor of Norfolk and Suffolk would have a major role in delivering transport improvements with the power, mandate, and funding to unlock traffic infrastructure across Suffolk, including a possible INR. The government has just thrown all that hard work in the bin by postponing mayoral elections until 2028.

So, Jack, before you pop up in the paper to criticise the County Council again, turn up to meetings and complete your own INR to-do list first. Whilst you're at it, maybe publicly try and persuade your Prime Minister to perform yet another screeching U-turn, this time on the mayoral elections. Then we can all sit down and talk about what's truly possible to make the biggest positive impact when it comes to the A14 – because unlike you, I want to achieve more than just headlines for the people of Ipswich.

Objection lodged to Red House Farm planning approval over school funding shortfall

The proposed Section 106 contributions will only provide a maximum of £12.2 million for education, falling well short of the £16.9 million required to provide sufficient nursery and school places for the new community. This leaves a funding gap of approximately £4.7 million, putting the future provision of local school and early years places at serious risk. Due to delivery timescales, any shortfall in infrastructure funding will become a liability that any successor council will ultimately have to absorb.

Councillor Andrew Reid, Suffolk County Council's Cabinet Member for Education and SEND, said:

“It is vital that all families in Ipswich have access to nurseries and schools, and that new developments meet the cost of the additional demand they create. Without full funding,

many families will be forced to travel outside their neighbourhood to access a school place, and the Local Education Authority will be at risk of being unable to meet its statutory duty to provide sufficient childcare and school places.”

Suffolk County Council has already called on Ipswich Borough Council to reconsider and reprioritise infrastructure contributions in favour of education, reviewing all contributions to ensure the needs of children and families are met.

The County Council warned back in October that, without this, it cannot support the current planning application and would consider its legal position regarding any Section 106 agreement that does not address these concerns. Ipswich Borough Council has refused and is pushing to approve the plans with the shortfall left unresolved.

Councillor Reid, continued:

“Suffolk County Council has no option but to formally object to these plans. The County Council does not take this step lightly and we understand the pressure Ipswich Borough Council is under to meet housing targets, but the basis for our objection is clear and in line with national planning policy – the wellbeing of children and families must come first.”

Loft insulation scammers ordered to pay £48,891 after targeting vulnerable Suffolk residents

Riva Surveyors Ltd has been ordered to pay £48,891 in fines and compensation, while senior salesman Justin Brason received a suspended prison sentence for his part in the scam.

Riva Surveyors Ltd (previously known as Riba Surveyors Ltd) and Justin Brason, aged 45, of Brambling Close, Stowmarket, appeared separately at Ipswich Crown Court on 9 December 2025 for sentencing, following an investigation led by Suffolk County Council’s Trading Standards team.

Between July 2019 and February 2020, the company cold-called or visited elderly homeowners across Suffolk, Essex, Cambridgeshire and Norfolk, claiming to offer free loft inspections.

Once inside the properties, “surveyors” falsely reported serious roof defects such as damp, mould or infestations, and urged householders to install spray foam insulation at vastly inflated prices. Victims were told the work was urgent and that their roofs were structurally unsound if left untreated.

In reality, the spray foam insulation sold was unnecessary and, in some cases, unsuitable for the properties, with an expert witness later confirming that the reported problems were exaggerated or entirely fabricated. The insulation could also reduce property value and make it harder to sell or remortgage.

Many victims were elderly and living alone. Out of 20 affected consumers, six went ahead with the work, suffering significant financial losses. Two victims later had to remove the insulation at additional cost so they could remortgage or sell their homes.

One victim's family described the lasting impact:

“The anxiety caused by this had a severe impact on my parents’ health. They were preyed upon by an unscrupulous person with no morals. I hope this outcome acts as a deterrent to others who destroy the lives of elderly people in this way.”

Riva Surveyors Ltd pleaded guilty to 21 counts of misleading actions under the Consumer Protection from Unfair Trading Regulations 2008. Brason pleaded guilty to eight counts under the same legislation. His later attempt to withdraw his guilty plea was rejected by the court in September 2025.

Sentencing is as follows:

Riva Surveyors Ltd:

- Fined £850 for each of 21 offences, a total of £17,850
- Ordered to pay £31,021 in compensation to affected consumers
- Combined total liability: £48,891, to be paid within 12 months
- No prosecution costs awarded due to the judge prioritising victim compensation

Justin Brason:

- 12 months’ imprisonment, suspended for 18 months
- Sentenced as 12 months for each of his eight offences, to run consecutively, reflecting that the judge considered each offence to be equally serious
- Ordered to pay £1,500 compensation, to be paid at £75 per month from February 2026
- 10 rehabilitation activity days
- 200 hours of unpaid work

The judge noted that culpability and harm were high but accepted that there had been no further complaints since the investigation began. As the company is now largely dormant, securing compensation for consumers was described as “a good result.”

Suffolk Trading Standards’ investigation was supported by the National Trading Standards Tri Region Investigation Team (TRIT) due to the scale of the offending across multiple counties.

Councillor Steve Wiles, Suffolk County Council’s Cabinet Member for Public Health and Public Protection, said:

“This case highlights the shocking lengths some individuals will go to in order to exploit the elderly and vulnerable in our communities.

“Suffolk Trading Standards work tirelessly to protect residents from scams like this, and I’m pleased that justice has been done for the victims in this case.”

Graham Crisp, Head of Suffolk Trading Standards, added:

“This was a deliberate and sustained campaign of deception. Victims were made to feel frightened and pressured into paying for unnecessary and sometimes damaging work. “We urge residents to always seek independent advice before agreeing to any work on their home, and to avoid engaging with cold callers offering free surveys or quick fixes.”

Lord Michael Bichard, Chair, National Trading Standards, said:

“There are too many examples of misconduct in the energy sector, and this case shows how vulnerable homeowners can be targeted.

“This case saw victims pressured into taking decisions they usually wouldn’t make. Victims were mistakenly led to believe that if they didn’t hand over significant sums of money their homes would soon become unsafe. The scam stripped homeowners not only of their savings but also caused huge emotional distress, leaving victims with long-lasting anxiety.

“If you or someone you know has been targeted by a scam like this, you should report it to the Citizens Advice consumer service helpline by calling 0808 223 1133.”

Spray foam insulation is not always suitable for retrofitting in homes and homeowners are advised to seek independent advice before proceeding. Those wishing to find reputable traders can use schemes such as Suffolk Trusted Trader, Norfolk Trusted Trader, or the Essex Buy With Confidence scheme – all endorsed by their local Trading Standards department.

£12m Active Travel funding over four years announced for Suffolk

Suffolk County Council has been awarded more than £12 million over four years by Active Travel England to continue its work promoting sustainable travel.

Active Travel England (ATE) works with local authorities and other bodies to help them put in place infrastructure and facilities that make it easier for more people to walk, wheel and cycle, more often, on local journeys.

It has awarded Suffolk a total of £12,537,098 for the period 2026/27 to 2029/30 to invest in footpaths, infrastructure, and cycle lanes.

Councillor Chris Chambers, Suffolk County Council Cabinet member for Transport Strategy said: “This is a fantastic amount of money for important schemes and a vote of confidence by ATE in the work we are doing.

“Congestion and pollution are the bane of our bigger towns, which is why it is important that we develop a network of measures to encourage people out of the car wherever possible.

“We have to make it easier for residents and businesses in our towns to get around without having to rely on private vehicles which do so much to clog up our roads.

“Reducing congestion frees up road space for the traffic that does need to be there and creates a cleaner, better environment for everyone.”

National Active Travel Commissioner Chris Boardman said: “The aim of Active Travel England is to give people more everyday choice in how they get around, by creating safe, accessible and welcoming streets.

“We are not just building infrastructure — together, we are creating communities: places where parents feel confident letting children travel independently, and where older people can reach local shops with ease. We are building life back into our streets.”

In Spring 2023 ATE awarded SCC £7.9 million to develop active travel schemes, followed later that year by £1.495m as part of the then-government’s national walking and cycling Social Prescribing pilot.

A further £3.7 million active travel funding was awarded in February this year.

The money has been used in a variety of ways, including most recently new pedestrian crossings in Bridge Street and College Road by Ipswich Waterfront.

Improved cycle routes include from Ipswich Hospital to the Waterfront area, Nacton Road in Ipswich, Main Road in Martlesham, and within Woodbridge as part of the town’s active travel project.

The latest ATE award for future funding to Suffolk is part of [a funding package for councils in England](#) totalling more than £626 million.

The announcement comes days after the Department for Transport announced it was awarding Suffolk nearly £27 million to run and enhance [bus services and infrastructure](#) between 2026 and 2029.

One Suffolk best for most vulnerable, say county’s safeguarding leaders

Two of the county’s most experienced practitioners in adults and children’s safeguarding are publicly endorsing the proposal for a single unitary authority in Suffolk – saying it offers the strongest protection for vulnerable people across the county.

As the government consultation on Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) reaches its halfway point, two of Suffolk’s most experienced safeguarding figures have given their backing to the One Suffolk plan.

Anthony Douglas, Independent Chair of the Suffolk Safeguarding Adults Board, and Chris Robson, Independent Scrutineer of the Safeguarding Children’s Board, both warn that the alternative proposal, to divide the county into three separate unitary authorities, poses significant risks for residents who rely on specialist support.

Under the One Suffolk model, all six existing councils would be replaced by a single authority responsible for both local and county-wide services. Government is currently consulting on two options for unitarisation in Suffolk as part of its wider reforms to local government.

Anthony Douglas, Independent Chair of the Suffolk Safeguarding Adults Board, said:

“My responsibility is to keep people in Suffolk safe, and to make sure that the agencies that look after them are doing it properly – and to support them in doing difficult work.

“In terms of what would work best for safeguarding, it has to be the One Suffolk option in which all services are integrated across the county – which includes housing services and many other specialist services that people depend upon.

“For me, running safeguarding services, One Suffolk will be easier to organise, cheaper and more likely to benefit people who need specialist support at short notice than would be the case if families and professionals have to navigate their way through multiple authorities.” He added that delays caused by navigating multiple authorities to find specialist help could create a “huge problem” for those in urgent need.

Chris Robson, Independent Scrutineer of the Safeguarding Children’s Board, said:

“My opinion – which is based purely on the facts and what I believe is best for vulnerable children – is that working with partners who can concentrate their efforts and join together in one area is more efficient than diluting resources and serving a greater number of geographical areas.

“Suffolk has an established, mature partnership which works tirelessly to safeguard children. We should be proud of what it has achieved and avoid any unnecessary disruption that disaggregation could bring.”

Independent financial analysis by Grant Thornton shows that One Suffolk is the only option that is financially sustainable. It would deliver savings of £78.2 million in the first five years, while a three-council model would cost £145.3 million more than the current two-tier system.

Anthony Douglas and Chris Robson join a growing coalition of community leaders across business, health, education, agriculture and tourism who have publicly supported the One Suffolk proposal.

Some of these figures have recorded videos on why they believe One Suffolk is the best option for our county.

Richard Rout, Cabinet Member for Devolution, Local Government Reform and NSIPs, said:

“When Anthony Douglas and Chris Robson speak, we should sit up and listen – they have vast experience of working with our county’s most vulnerable children and adults, and have their best interests at heart.

“It is clear that One Suffolk is the smartest, simplest and best option for Suffolk. The alternative three-council model would threaten vital services for vulnerable residents, leave council services at significant financial risk and create a postcode lottery for residents.

“Communities from across the county have already engaged with us to shape the One Suffolk proposal. Now it is time to have our say in the Government’s public consultation – I urge you all to take part.”

The One Suffolk business case is built on rigorous financial analysis of Suffolk-based data conducted by global advisory firm Grant Thornton, rather than using generic national modelling as used in the three-council model.

The Government’s statutory consultation on LGR in Suffolk will close on 11th January. Following this, Government Ministers will make a decision on which form of unitary authority to adopt in Suffolk – either one or three.

County council reacts to new appointment at Sizewell C

Sizewell C today announced that Julia Pyke would be stepping down as joint Managing Director and that Nigel Cann will be taking on the role of CEO from 1 January 2026.

“Julia was a visible and public face for the scheme, always willing to attend community forums and events. It’s important that the new CEO is equally visible.”

Councillor Richard Rout, Suffolk County Council’s Cabinet Member for Devolution, Local Government Reorganisation and NSIPs

Suffolk County Council officers and councillors had a good relationship with Julia Pyke, who was well-respected – particularly for her work with local communities.

Councillor Richard Rout, Suffolk County Council’s Cabinet Member for Devolution, Local Government Reorganisation and NSIPs, said:

“Despite the very mixed views about the scheme locally and often strong local opposition, Julia’s commitment to doing right by local communities, was one of the most positive assets to the Sizewell C project.

“The balance that had been struck between preparing the project for construction, and handling communities and businesses with sensitivity cannot have been easy, but Julia

managed it well. She took time to listen to concerns, respond and put things right where possible.

“My message to Sizewell C is to maintain this legacy – do not row back on the positive relationships and goodwill that has been built up to this point. Julia was a visible and public face for the scheme, always willing to attend community forums and events. It’s important that the new CEO is equally visible.

“Our communities continue to face waves of impacts from various infrastructure projects around the Suffolk coast – the council will continue to play its part by holding projects like Sizewell C to account.”

Suffolk, with the approval of Sizewell C now given, will be home to the UK’s foremost operational nuclear cluster.

The county council will leverage the opportunity for economic growth, maximising the opportunity for Suffolk’s supply chain and workforce in the operation and maintenance of nuclear facilities across the UK. This ambition was championed by Julia Pyke and the county council expects to continue to work with EDF to achieve this.

Furthermore, the council will continue to ensure that the surrounding communities, bearing the disruption of a twelve-year construction period, will receive the full package of agreed mitigation measures specified in the consent, by SZC Ltd.

67 new Skills Bootcamps launched in Suffolk and Norfolk

People and businesses across Suffolk and Norfolk now have access to 67 new training programmes, designed to help address regional skill gaps and support career development in key industries.

The programmes – known as Skills Bootcamps – are short, flexible courses that teach practical skills employers are looking for.

Training is available in a wide range of areas, including transport, clean energy, health and social care, construction, agriculture, the visitor economy, digital technology and manufacturing.

Courses range from bus driving and aviation skills to heat pump installation and AI literacy, reflecting the variety of roles local employers need to fill.

The bootcamps are open to anyone aged 19 and over looking to change careers or improve their skills, as well as to employers who want to train their staff.

The programmes are delivered jointly by Suffolk County Council and Norfolk County Council, working with a range of providers, and are funded by the Department for Education through the government's Skills for Life initiative.

Cllr Richard Smith MVO, Suffolk County Council's deputy leader and cabinet member for finance, economic development and skills, said:

"Expanding the Skills Bootcamp offer across Norfolk and Suffolk shows what can be achieved when we work together as a region. These programmes will help people across both counties gain the skills that local employers are crying out for, supporting good jobs, stronger businesses and a more resilient economy. It's a real investment in our future – making sure our area has the talent and opportunities it needs to thrive."

Cllr Fabian Eagle, Norfolk County Council's cabinet member for economic growth, said:

"We're proud to deliver this fantastic opportunity for our residents and employers alike. Aligned to our Norfolk Economic Strategy, they offer fast and flexible training of in-demand skills supporting those looking for work, a change of career or in-work progression. "For our businesses they offer faster recruitment and critical workforce development skills supporting staff retention, productivity, efficiency, and growth. Skills Bootcamps offer benefits for all and we would strongly recommend you explore our diverse menu of provision."

For more information on Skills Bootcamps, including available courses and how to apply, visit: <https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/business/supporting-employers-training-your-workforce/skills-bootcamps>

Firefighter applications surge as Suffolk boosts female representation

Applications to join Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) have surged by 32% compared to last year, highlighting a growing interest in a career that makes a real difference to local communities.

This year's recruitment drive also saw a significant increase in female representation among successful candidates, with women making up 17.2% of the recruitment pool compared to 11.7% last year, which represents a 38% rise. This marks an important step toward building a workforce that truly reflects the communities it protects.

The campaign drew applications from across England, and even attracted one candidate from Wales, highlighting the strong appeal of a career in the fire and rescue service, and the commitment of those willing to travel to pursue their chosen profession.

This year, 389 people applied, up from 280 in 2024, demonstrating that more individuals than ever are motivated by a career in public service.

To ensure fairness and consistency, SFRS hosted a series of mandatory taster sessions to launch the campaign, giving candidates the best possible introduction to the role of a firefighter.

These sessions provided an opportunity to meet crews, tour stations, and receive guidance on preparing for each stage of the process. PPE measurements were also taken to ensure readiness for later assessments.

Due to high demand, an additional taster session was hosted, alongside a virtual option for On Call firefighters, Wholetime transfers, and those unable to attend in person.

Recruitment outcomes at a glance:

- Applications up 32% from 2024 (389 vs 280).
- Female representation in the recruitment pool has increased from 11.7% to 17.2% – a 38% rise.
- 345 candidates progressed to the first stage of assessment.
- 203 advanced to the second stage and were assessed against the National Fire Chiefs Council Leadership Framework and the Code of Ethics - 116 passed.
- 88 were members of the public; 28 were existing on call firefighters.
- Following firefighter-specific aptitude and fitness tests, 100 candidates were then interviewed at SFRS Headquarters at Endeavour House, Ipswich.

It is anticipated that 64 candidates will be added to the Service's recruitment pool, ensuring there have suitable applicants available when firefighter positions arise.

This represents a 100% increase on last year's pool of 32.

Commenting on the outcomes achieved, **Martyn Hazelwood, Recruitment and Retention Manager at Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service**, said:

"This year's campaign has sparked incredible interest, and we're proud to see so many people wanting to make a difference by joining the fire service.

"It's particularly encouraging to see a significant rise in female applicants because it shows real progress toward the diversity and inclusion values we actively promote.

Councillor Steve Wiles, Suffolk County Council's Cabinet Member for Public Health and Public Safety is equally delighted:

"This is great news for both the Service and Suffolk. By expanding the recruitment pool, SFRS has taken a proactive approach to ensure it not only continues to meet the current needs of the county, but also any future requirements.

"Immediate access to a select group of individuals chosen for their commitment and readiness to serve provides confidence that vacancies can be filled quickly, ensuring the

Service maintains a strong, dedicated team with the flexibility to respond efficiently to the community's evolving needs."

The first cohort of successful candidates is expected to begin training in February.

For information about future recruitment opportunities, visit [Current Vacancies - SFRS](#).

OPINION: How Suffolk is investing in our roads

By Councillor Paul West, Suffolk County Council Cabinet member for Operational Highways, Flooding & Ipswich

Potholes are undoubtedly the bane of a motorist's life and remain one of the most common complaints landing in councillors' inboxes.

In a recent newspaper column, the Ipswich MP claimed that Suffolk will receive £219.4 million over the next four years to address potholes.

However, this figure does not tell the whole story.

The Department for Transport's small print makes clear that the funding must also be used for footways, bridges, highway drainage, and street lighting, not solely for pothole repairs. Moreover, the announcement assumes the government will fully deliver on this commitment.

Recent experience suggests otherwise. In the last two weeks, it has been confirmed that the postponement of the mayoral elections means Suffolk will miss out on its share of £37 million in the next two years, funding that was originally included in the devolution deal. The MP went on to suggest that the additional funding would allow us to "renew worn-out road surfaces" and "end the endless cycle of emergency repairs."

The majority of road funding is already spent on planned resurfacing and surface-dressing schemes.

This financial year alone, nearly 150 locations and more than 100 miles of road are included in such programmes across the county.

Preventative maintenance remains a key priority. Last autumn, Suffolk Highways trialled specialist equipment, including a Dragon Patcher and Roadmender, to repair defects before they developed into potholes.

During the trial, more than 3,500 defects were treated across over 230 roads. While assessments are still underway to determine value for money and where they can be best used, early indications suggest this approach could improve efficiency in the future. There is no doubt that Suffolk's roads have steadily improved in the last ten years.

Independent surveys show a two-thirds reduction in A-roads classified as being in the worst condition since 2011, with nearly 300 miles of road moved out of the poorest category, while more than 350 miles now fall within the best condition band, bringing the total to 3,295 miles - 77% of Suffolk's roads.

This improvement has not come by chance. Since 2017, Suffolk County Council has invested more than £20 million of local taxpayer funds, resurfacing 1,000 miles of road and securing additional investment for drainage and pavements.

Suffolk has also consistently met the highest performance standards, enabling it to secure full funding from the Department for Transport under previous best-practice schemes.

The busier a road is the greater the chance that a defect could cause a problem, so Suffolk Highways gives greater priority to repairing roads that carry the most vehicles.

Regular safety inspections are carried out, with the frequency depending on how busy the road is.

However, potholes and other defects may still appear between inspections, especially after freezing conditions when water in the road surface freezes and expands, causing cracks.

This year alone the Suffolk Highways 2025/26 surface dressing programme, which concluded at the end of August, treated a total of 90 sites covering over 90 miles of road.

Similarly, this year's resurfacing programme will deliver works across 57 locations covering more than 11 miles. So far, 22 of the 58 resurfacing sites have been delivered with the remainder coming by the end of the financial year.

Yet there is more to be done. Progress cannot stand still. As a motorist myself, I want to see both local and national government commit further funding to our road network.

Motorists already face mounting costs—vehicle tax, fuel duty, and rising insurance premiums among them – so it is important we get something back.

Another charge is now also looming. In the recent Budget, the Chancellor announced plans for a pay-per-mile road tax for electric and plug-in hybrid vehicles.

While the government has delayed implementation until April 2028 to work up the detail, road pricing, it seems, may soon be added to the growing list of financial burdens facing motorists.

I expect this is one promise that the government will keep.

Suffolk residents urged to apply quickly for free home energy upgrades

At the end of November 2025, Suffolk County Council secured £1.38 million from the government's Warm Homes Local Grant Fund.

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.

“Over recent years, Warm Homes Suffolk has made improvements to hundreds of properties, giving people warmer, safer homes and reducing their energy bills.”
Councillor Richard Rout, Suffolk County Council's Cabinet Member for Devolution, Local Government Reorganisation and NSIPs

To be eligible, Suffolk homes must:

- be privately owned (either by you or your landlord)
- 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.

Shirley from Ipswich was supported through a previous Warm Homes Suffolk initiative, to have cavity wall insulation, electric storage heaters and solar panels fitted to her home, improving the Energy Performance Certificate rating from a D to an A:

“I really noticed the difference with the wall insulation and was immediately warmer. I'm very happy with the new modern storage heaters, I had tiny heaters before.

“Now I have solar panels, I'm looking forward to my electricity bill being lower. I'm very thankful for the installation.”

Councillor Richard Rout, Suffolk County Council's Cabinet Member for Devolution, Local Government Reorganisation and NSIPs, said:

“Over recent years, Warm Homes Suffolk has made improvements to hundreds of properties, giving people warmer, safer homes and reducing their energy bills.

“We are constantly looking for ways to support our residents most in need, and securing the latest round of funding is evidence of that.

“But people must apply soon, as government has only given us a few months to distribute this funding.”

To check your eligibility, or to find out more about how Warm Homes Suffolk could help you, visit www.warmhomessuffolk.org or call the team on 03456 037 686.

LionLink consultation to launch in the new year, communities encouraged to take part

A written consultation and materials will launch on 13 January 2026, supported by five public information exhibitions in Saxmundham, Southwold, Hinton, Westleton and Yoxford. The consultation will close on 10 March 2026.

It is imperative that local communities engage with the upcoming LionLink consultation... I completely understand that some communities are exhausted – on a constantly moving conveyor belt of responding to consultation after consultation, for project after project.

Councillor Richard Rout, Suffolk County Council’s Cabinet Member for Devolution, Local Government Reorganisation and NSIPs

The planning of the LionLink project is now reaching its final stages, before an expected application for a Development Consent Order later in 2026.

Therefore, the county council is urging concerned residents, businesses, organisations and town and parish councils to get up-to-speed with the scheme’s plans, so they are in a position to contribute to the forthcoming consultation.

Councillor Richard Rout, Suffolk County Council’s Cabinet Member for Devolution, Local Government Reorganisation and NSIPs, said:

“It is imperative that local communities engage with the upcoming LionLink consultation, it is the final chance to influence the design, the routing, and ultimately the need for the project, before the application is submitted.

“I completely understand that some communities are exhausted – on a constantly moving conveyor belt of responding to consultation after consultation, for project after project. Much of which could have been mitigated if there was better coordination across all the huge infrastructure projects on Suffolk’s doorstep.

“That is something that the county council has been calling for years, lobbying government and project promoters. In this case, coordination between National Grid’s own projects, LionLink and Sea Link.

“So, it was incredibly frustrating when National Grid published details in March 2024, to say that it has no intention to coordinate LionLink with Sea Link at Aldeburgh, instead it is proposing a separate landing point at either Southwold or Walberswick. This will only cause further unnecessary destruction of the Suffolk countryside and natural environment.”

Initial details about the consultation are available on [National Grid’s LionLink website](#), with further information being published in the new year.

Melford Road active travel scheme to be cancelled

A scheme to install a new walking and cycling route and new pedestrian crossings in Sudbury has been cancelled.

Melford Road would have seen the replacement of existing zebra crossings with parallel crossings and installation of a shared-use off-road pedestrian and cycle facility, with cycle priority across side roads.

Installation works by Suffolk County Council were scheduled to begin in mid-January 2026 and complete by the end of March 2026.

However, following local concerns about the scheme, which was funded by Active Travel England, it has been decided it should now not go ahead.

Councillor Chris Chambers, Suffolk County Council Cabinet Member for Transport Strategy said: “Local people voiced concerns about the scheme and we have listened.

“This council is proud to champion projects which promote sustainable travel and reduce car use, thus cutting congestion and pollution in our towns.

“On this occasion my colleagues at Babergh District Council and local people expressed concerns about the proposed scheme and we have acted on those concerns.”

Councillor Chambers said that work would continue to identify and develop other potential active travel schemes in the Sudbury area.

Active Travel England works with local authorities and other bodies to help them put in place infrastructure and facilities that make it easier for more people to walk, wheel and cycle, more often, on local journeys.

On December 11 it announced it was awarding Suffolk a total of £12,537,098 for the period 2026/27 to 2029/30.

Since 2023 Suffolk has received more than £13m, which has been used on schemes including new pedestrian crossings in Bridge Street and College Road by Ipswich Waterfront. Improved cycle routes include from Ipswich Hospital to the Waterfront area, Nacton Road in Ipswich, Main Road in Martlesham, and within Woodbridge as part of the town's active travel project.

The projects form part of Suffolk's wider [Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan](#) to deliver safer, greener routes across the county.

Statement on provisional local government finance settlement 2026 to 2027

Cllr Richard Smith MVO, Suffolk County Council's deputy leader and cabinet member for finance, economic development and skills, said:

"We are deeply disappointed by the government's [provisional local government finance settlement](#). Our current understanding is that Suffolk County Council now faces a £6 million budget gap — £3.5 million worse than we had previously forecast.

"This is despite government assumptions that councils will raise Council Tax by the maximum amount every year, and the introduction of a so-called 'fairer' funding model. In reality, the government has shifted resources towards metropolitan areas at the expense of rural counties like ours, while injecting very little new money into the system.

"This settlement makes an already difficult financial position even more challenging. We will continue to press for a genuinely fair funding formula that properly reflects the needs and costs of delivering services in rural communities."

Leading think tank endorses single unitary authority for Suffolk

A leading think tank has welcomed proposals for a single unitary authority for Suffolk, highlighting the opportunity to support economic growth without fragmenting local governance.

In its report *Priority Growth: How to reorganise local government in 2026*, Centre for Cities argues that Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) should simplify governance and provide areas with the scale and capacity needed to drive growth.

Using Travel to Work Areas (TTWAs), a tool to indicate an area where the population might commute to a larger town or city, the report suggests that these areas should be aligned with new unitary boundaries.

A single unitary authority for Suffolk would strongly reflect this principle – both empowering Ipswich and enabling growth across the county.

The report says: “The [High Skill Travel to Work Areas] for Norwich and Ipswich are very large and encompass almost all of authorities A and B respectively, such that the alternative proposals would seriously fragment local governance across each local economy.”

The report notes that a One Suffolk unitary authority would bring together strategic functions under one democratically accountable body, reducing fragmentation and duplication while improving coordination across housing, transport, skills and public services.

The report says: “Decisive action in the DPP areas in 2026 will break the deadlock facing the Government in this area, and set the stage for devolution to underpin higher growth and public service reform across the country for the rest of this Parliament and decades to come.”

The report emphasises that successful local government reorganisation should be grounded in functional economic areas. Suffolk’s economy lends itself to a single authority capable of taking a county-wide strategic view.

Richard Rout, Cabinet Member for Devolution, Local Government Reform and NSIPs, said:

“We’ve said throughout this process that there isn’t a strong Suffolk without a strong Ipswich, and vice versa. This report further cements the idea that a single unitary authority for Suffolk will provide the best outcome for the economic growth of our market town and the wider region.

“We welcome this endorsement of the One Suffolk proposal and would encourage everyone to read the report by the Centre for Cities.

“The report comes at a vital time as we approach the final few weeks of the Government’s consultation on LGR. Please take some time to respond to this consultation and have your say on the future of local government in Suffolk.”

The One Suffolk business case is built on rigorous financial analysis of Suffolk-based data conducted by global advisory firm Grant Thornton, rather than using generic national modelling as used in the three-council model.

This is one of two proposals being consulted on by the government. The alternative, from Suffolk’s districts and borough councils, would see Suffolk split into three arbitrary council areas, putting key services such as social care at serious risk and costing millions to set up.

The government consultation on LGR in Suffolk is now live and will run online until January 11th.

Council secures £2.9 million from DfT Incentive Fund for 2025/26

Suffolk County Council has been awarded £2.9 million from the Department for Transport's 2025/26 Incentive Fund for best practice in highways management.

The fund, introduced by the current government, rewards local authorities that demonstrate excellence in highway asset management and efficiency.

The award builds on the council's strong track record of success in previous years, where it has consistently secured the maximum available funding under similar schemes.

Under the Incentive Fund scheme authorities must report:

- Highway maintenance spend over the past five years
- Road condition data, with trend analysis
- Pothole repair statistics for the last five years
- A 2025/26 resurfacing plan
- Show a balance of preventive against reactive maintenance
- Coordination with utilities to reduce disruption
- Climate resilience efforts
- Adoption of best practices and innovation

Councillor Paul West, Suffolk County Council Cabinet Member for Operational Highways, said the award reflected the council's commitment to delivering a high-performing, cost-effective highways service that prioritises long-term sustainability and value for money.

"We are pleased to have met the detailed requirements of the government's incentive fund and that they have given the green light to the maximum funding – it is a testament to the hard work and dedication of our highways teams.

"By embracing innovation and best practice, we have positioned Suffolk as one of the leading authorities in the country for highway asset management – and we have now been endorsed in our endeavours by the government.

"This investment will help us maintain and improve our network for the benefit of residents, businesses, and visitors."

Suffolk County Council will spend a total of £47.3 million on highways maintenance in 2025-26.

The Suffolk Highways 2025/26 surface dressing programme treated a total of 90 sites covering over 90 miles of road.

Similarly, this year's resurfacing programme will deliver works across 57 locations covering more than 11 miles.

So far, 22 of the 58 resurfacing sites have been delivered with the remainder coming by the end of the financial year.

OPINION: Looking ahead to a new year of change and opportunity

For many of us, this time of year goes hand in hand with reflection, resolutions, and plans for the year ahead. In local government we are no different, and the end of the year provides a welcome opportunity to look forward and focus on how we can make 2026 a success for Suffolk.

I know that for many people this period of reflection is a luxury. For countless residents, work does not slow down or stop over the Christmas period.

So, I want to begin by thanking everyone who has contributed to delivering essential services across Suffolk over the festive season. Whether you work in the emergency services, care sector, or in shipping and delivery, your dedication keeps our county moving, and it does not go unnoticed.

In Suffolk we are gearing up for a year unlike any other. Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) will mean that, in a little over two years' time, the county council, as well as the districts and boroughs, will cease to exist. The tapestry of local government will change for good as we move towards a more straightforward system of unitary government.

In the coming months, government will decide what form that new unitary authority will take, but I remain utterly convinced that the only sensible, sustainable, and safe outcome for Suffolk would be for government to choose the "One Suffolk" proposal for a single authority across our county. This would save millions of pounds every year, allow council tax to harmonise to the lowest level possible, and empower the real workhorses of local government, towns, and parish councils, to do more for their communities with enhanced support and opportunities for funding.

The upcoming year is also one of real opportunity for Suffolk. If central government would just get on and fund the projects which already have widespread support, like the Ely and Haughley junctions, we could see the start of a project that would ultimately remove thousands of HGVs from our main roads and onto rail.

There are also the government's promises around national SEND reform. So far this has been delayed but given that every authority across the country is reporting serious issues with the levels of demand they face, it really is an area the government should get on with

and tackle properly. Whilst I am pleased to acknowledge that several indicators point to positive progress made by this council within our own SEND services, and alongside partners across health, schools and the Suffolk Parent Carer Forum, we cannot keep waiting for government to deliver on its own promised reforms and improved funding - we need this reform now.

There are also huge opportunities to deliver better care and support for adults. In Suffolk we are already a national leader in respect of digital care, with our services currently rated as Good by the CQC. However, where are the government's long-promised adult social care reforms? When it came to power a year and a half ago, the government scrapped the previous government's white paper on social care, promising a new National Care Service. Now this seems to have been kicked yet again into ever longer grass. It seems to me that the priority of social care is coming a poor third behind dealing with doctors' strikes and the Secretary of State's own future career ambitions. The government must do better for our most vulnerable residents and their families in 2026.

As a county we have a massive farming heritage, and whilst I welcome the government's recent U-turn on their devastating family farm inheritance tax, there are real opportunities to do more to support our farmers who feed us and safeguard our environment. This includes abolishing their ridiculous tax entirely and reducing net zero legislation to support lower energy costs now. We cannot continue to allow expensive energy costs to damage Suffolk industry and destroy national economic growth.

This New Year's, thousands of people will head into bars and restaurants across Suffolk to celebrate. Government must do more to support our hospitality sector, recognising the important role it plays in bringing communities together, providing entertainment, and creating many jobs. Businesses need support to start up and be successful; they need to be helped to create more jobs, not taxed out of existence the moment they start trading by a government addicted to tax and spend.

For our part, Suffolk County Council will continue to invest all we can in our towns, villages and communities, ensuring our county remains one of the very best places to live, work and raise a family.

Since 2017, Suffolk County Council has invested more than £20 million in resurfacing 1,000 miles of road and securing additional investment for drainage and pavements. We have invested in new technology to make road repairs quicker and cheaper, and such opportunities for new tools and approaches will continue to be explored next year.

Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service will forge ahead with its improvement plan, with a strong focus on investing in our people, the service, and the equipment they rely on, ensuring we continue to provide the very best protection and support for Suffolk's communities.

Alongside this, our Trading Standards team will remain relentless in tackling scams, illegal trading, and rogue operators, actively protecting residents and holding offenders to account.

There is much to look forward to, from the Suffolk Show and the 20th anniversary of Latitude Festival to Ipswich Town continuing their push for success on the pitch.

I would like to wish everyone across Suffolk a very happy New Year. I sincerely hope that 2026 brings health, happiness, and opportunity to you all.

Scheme to boost biodiversity and tackle flooding on the River Tin at Bungay

A natural flood management scheme is to be installed on a flood-prone river in north Suffolk.

The River Tin, named locally as 'Tin River' is a tributary of the River Waveney that has long contributed to flooding across the Bungay area.

Now, Suffolk County Council, in partnership with the River Waveney Trust, has secured more than £50,000 from the East Anglian Regional Flood and Coastal Committee. The work will deliver a number of features to enhance biodiversity and reduce flood risk to Bungay. Delivery is expected in 2026.

The Tin River catchment area covers around 17 square miles, with the river flowing through Bungay before connecting to the River Waveney.

Tin River has been heavily modified over the years through straightening and deepening. The channel often runs dry in the summer but is susceptible to rapid rises in water levels during storms, overwhelming the system, and resulting in flash flooding.

The nearby A144 floods regularly - sometimes along a 500-metre stretch - causing disruption to residents, businesses, and agricultural operations.

Downstream, the town of Bungay continues to face surface-water flooding risks, with a number of residential properties being at risk of flooding.

The works will take place along the river at two separate locations and will comprise of a range of natural features.

This includes reconnection of a meadow to the floodplain, construction of a new pond to create water storage, and installing a series of leaky barriers - dams made from natural woody materials, designed to allow water to spill naturally onto the meadow during heavy rainfall, slowing flow, increasing infiltration, and reducing downstream flood risk.

Matt Hullis, Head of Environment Strategy for Suffolk County Council, said: "The Tin is a small but ecologically significant tributary of the River Waveney.

"Recent conservation projects have enhanced its role as a wildlife corridor, making it an important part of Suffolk's river landscape.

“The measures we are undertaking will reduce flood risk to homes, businesses, and transport routes; increase water storage and slowing flow, improve water quality and enhance biodiversity across its catchment area.”

Angela Lamb of the River Waveney Trust said: “We are really pleased to be working in partnership with Suffolk County Council, local landowners and the community of Bungay to develop projects on Tin River. It is a fantastic opportunity to create more diverse habitat, improve water quality and have a positive impact on downstream flooding.

“Developing these two sites is just the start of wider plans; we are looking for further opportunities within the Tin River catchment to re-establish natural river processes.

“It is not possible to prevent all flood events from Tin River, but we can reduce that impact by slowing the flow of water through its tributaries and by finding more places for natural water storage within the landscape upstream of St John's Road.

“We are focused on developing a catchment-wide project that creates a wildlife corridor through an agricultural landscape, some of which is accessible by public footpaths, so it's good news for wildlife and the people of Bungay.”

Councillor Paul West, Suffolk County Council Cabinet Member for Operational Highways and Flooding, said: “These important works are good news for the public and the environment.

“Flooding severely disrupts road networks through closures, structural damage, and traffic delays, hindering transportation and emergency response.

“These works will also enhance wetland and meadow habitats, giving the public restored views of the river from local footpaths and increasing wildlife presence in the revitalised wetland areas.”

Primary school application deadline approaches

Applications should be made for children born between 1 September 2021 and 31 August 2022 who are due to start primary school from September 2026.

An application for a full-time school place must be made even if a child is already attending a nursery class in an infant or primary school, a pre-school or a family hub next to a school site.

“Parents and carers need to apply for a school place by the closing date of 15 January 2026 to make sure they have the best chance of securing a place at their preferred school.”

Councillor Andrew Reid, Suffolk County Council’s Cabinet Member for Education and SEND

Cllr Reid continued: “It is important that parents and carers consider how they will get their child to and from school before making a school application. We also recommend applying for more than one school and up to three schools can be listed in order of preference.”

If you are planning to move house, or you think your circumstances may change before September, it is still essential to make an application on time using the child’s current address. Further information to help parents and carers with this process is available at www.suffolk.gov.uk/admissions.

Applications should be made online as this will mean parents and carers will receive a confirmation of their application. They can then log onto the online service on the National Offer Day (Thursday 16 April 2026) to see their school place offer and they will also be sent an email to confirm this offer on the same day.

If a parent or carer is unable to apply online then they should complete a paper application (CAF1), however these cannot be acknowledged, so it is suggested parents and carers obtain proof of postage. For those who completed paper applications, offer letters will be sent out by second class post on the National Offer Day.

School Travel eligibility is based on a child attending their nearest suitable school that would have had a place available. This might not be the catchment area school. To find out more about SCC’s school travel policy please visit www.suffolkonboard.com/schooltravel.

Applications can be made at www.suffolk.gov.uk/admissions, where further advice and guidance is also available. Alternatively, parents and carers can call 0345 600 0981 for a paper application (CAF1).

Last year, Suffolk County Council offered 96.3% of children a place at the primary school their parent or carer listed as their first preference when they applied on time. If parents and carers do not apply by the closing date, their application may not be dealt with until after places have been offered to those who applied on time.