

SUFFOLK COUNTY COUNCILLOR'S REPORT – JANUARY 2026



Cllr Stephen Burroughes - Framlingham Division

• **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. 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.

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.

• **INSPECTORATE SATISFIED WITH SUFFOLK FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE'S IMPROVEMENTS**

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. 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.

• **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>

• 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.

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

The progress of improvements to special educational needs and disabilities provision in Suffolk was discussed at Education Scrutiny Committee in 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.

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.

• **£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.

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.

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.

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.

• 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.

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

'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.

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.

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 LAUNCHING AND COMMUNITIES ENCOURAGED TO TAKE PART

A written consultation and materials will launch from 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.

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.

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

Cllr Stephen Burroughes

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Suffolk County Council*