

Annual Town and Parish Newsletter 2024

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April 2023

99% of pupils receive a preferred primary school place on National Offer Day

99.18% of children were offered a place on National Offer Day at one of their three preferred primary schools and 95.78% were offered a place at their first preference school.

Suffolk County Council received 7,056 applications from parents and carers indicating which primary school they would prefer their child to join in September 2023.

Families who applied online can log on to the Admissions Portal from today to see the school their child has been offered. They will also receive an email to confirm this offer. Letters will be sent to parents who made a paper application by second-class post today (17th April 2023).

Allan Cadzow, Director of Children's, and Young People Services for Suffolk County Council said:

"It is great news that the majority of families have once again been offered a place at one of their preferred schools, especially with so many being offered a place at their first preference school."

"We appreciate that not all families may have received a place at their preferred school. If a parents' preference for a Suffolk school is refused, we will automatically add their child's name to the waiting list for that school. Parents and carers will also be advised about how to lodge an appeal should they wish to do so."

Once school places have been confirmed, parents need to consider how their child will get to and from school. If their child is eligible for Suffolk County Council funded school travel, they will receive an email by 12 May 2023 with details of how to opt in.

Any parents or carers with a child born between 1 September 2018 and 31 August 2019 who have not yet applied for a school place should make an application immediately.

Information on how to make an application can be found on the [School admission pages](#) or by contacting Suffolk County Council on **0345 600 0981**.

May 2023

Revised policy agreed to protect Suffolk's water supplies

Suffolk County Council Cabinet has today (16th May) agreed to a revised infrastructure policy to support water security in the region.

As part of its focus on adapting to a changing climate, Cabinet members agreed a revision to the Energy Infrastructure Policy to cover future projects needed to protect and maintain water resources, including reservoirs, pipelines, and water recycling plants.

This new policy addition lays out how future water infrastructure projects will be managed and the council's role with stakeholders, such as the water companies, Ofwat and the Environment Agency. It also sets out how the council will recover the money it has to spend in the planning process for infrastructure projects.

Richard Rout, Cabinet Member for Finance and Environment, at Suffolk County Council, said:

"In order to adapt to the changing climate, Suffolk will need to host new infrastructure that is critical to safeguard our water supplies.

"Sufficient water supply is critical to so much of what we do here in Suffolk. It is something we take for granted – we all expect to turn on a tap and see water come out, but to secure that supply for the future, new infrastructure on a substantial scale will be essential.

"East Anglia has a huge role in delivering food security to our nation, and, for agriculture to be sustainable in our region, our farming community needs a guarantee that sufficient water supplies will be available.

"This supply is important for not only residential, business, and agricultural use, but also to protect and enhance the environment of Suffolk by supporting river levels and groundwater.

"The existing energy policy has been very successful in shaping the council's response to new energy infrastructure and in guiding our engagement with applicants, regulators and government. This new addition will greatly enhance this policy and once again, shows how protecting and enhancing our environment is priority for Suffolk County Council."

To reflect the changes, the policy has been renamed the Energy and Climate Adaptive Infrastructure Policy.

In February 2021, the Cabinet of Suffolk County Council adopted an Energy Infrastructure Policy, that set out the Council's approach to major infrastructure projects for energy generation and transmission, with a particular focus on those consented under the Planning Act 2008, known as Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects.

As part of that decision, it was agreed that the policy would be revised after two years.

Library services protected as Suffolk County Council approves additional funding

Suffolk County Council has today (16th May) underlined its commitment to library services in Suffolk.

Suffolk County Council has underlined its commitment to library services in Suffolk, as it approved plans to increase its funding to Suffolk Libraries, to enable the service to continue operating at its current level, until the end of the contract in July 2024.

Suffolk Libraries currently receives £5.9m per year from Suffolk County Council, however the service is forecasting a deficit of £60k per month from April 2023. The service has cited increases in service costs, a reduction in income opportunities following the Coronavirus Pandemic and rising inflation, as causes of the deficit.

This means it is no longer possible for the service to continue operating at its current level of service, within its current contract value.

At Suffolk County Council's Cabinet meeting, the council has approved plans to absorb this cost pressure, funding Suffolk Libraries an additional £720k per year, through to the end of the current contract in July 2024. This additional funding will support Suffolk Libraries to continue delivering its highly valued services to Suffolk Residents.

Cllr Bobby Bennett, Cabinet Member for Equality and Communities, said:

"We recognise the important role that Libraries play in the community, they offer so much more than just books; providing community spaces which bring people together, to learn, socialise, read, and take part in activities.

"We are proud of the work Suffolk libraries do, which is recognised nationally, and we are committed to supporting the service to maintain this high standard.

"This is why Suffolk County Council is increasing its funding to Suffolk Libraries, to support them to continue delivering the outstanding service they provide for our residents."

The council has previously made a commitment to continue to support Suffolk Libraries. At Suffolk County Council's full council meeting in February, the council agreed to fund an additional £250k in the first quarter of the 2023/24 financial year to help with the increased costs Highlighted by Suffolk Libraries. This £250k for the first quarter of the year is included within the overall figure agreed by Cabinet, of an additional £720k for the 2023/24 financial year.

The council also supported Suffolk Libraries with £155,000 for initiatives to support residents with Cost of Living and support for Digital Inclusion in the 2022/23 financial year.

In addition, the Council continues to successfully access Section 106 funding to support ongoing building developments required to ensure buildings are fit for purpose and support service delivery.

Bruce Leeke, CEO of Suffolk Libraries, said:

“We are delighted that Suffolk County Council has agreed to provide us with additional funding for the remainder of our current contract. Our direct library costs have significantly increased over the last few years and the pandemic impacted our ongoing fundraising and income generation initiatives. This has combined to create a budget deficit which would have made it difficult to maintain the same comprehensive service for the people of Suffolk without additional support.

“Since 2012, we have been nationally recognised for delivering innovative and forward-thinking services which reduce inequality and improve community wellbeing, whilst saving a significant amounts of public money.

“We have a very positive and supportive relationship with the county council and this decision shows that councillors appreciate the responsiveness, skill and passion of our colleagues working at the heart of every major community in Suffolk.”

Spotlight on improving air quality as county-wide strategy launched

Suffolk County Council has set out its plan for improving air quality in Suffolk following results from a recent air quality survey, as its county-wide Air Quality Strategy is published.

Air quality continues to be an important public health issue and a driver of health inequalities which disproportionately affects some of our most vulnerable residents in Suffolk.

The county council recently engaged with Suffolk’s residents about their thoughts on the impact poor air quality has on their quality of life. The survey received 338 responses and had a particular focus on Ipswich residents, because Ipswich makes up four of Suffolk’s eight Air Quality Management Areas (AQMAs). AQMAs are areas where national target levels of Nitrogen Dioxide are being exceeded.

Some of the results of the survey showed that there is a need to increase awareness about how residents can reduce pollution by reducing indoor burning of wood and coal, encouraging businesses to replace their fleet with low-emission or electric vehicles, reducing short journeys by car and considering more sustainable forms of transport such as walking, bike or bus. Vehicle idling when stationary is also a contributor to high levels of air pollution, an area the strategy will focus on going forward.

Councillor Paul West, Suffolk County Council’s Cabinet Member for Ipswich, Operational Highways and Flooding, said:

“It is vital to ensure we are doing everything we can to tackle to problem of poor air quality across our county. The responses to our survey have given us a good starting point so that we can pinpoint particular issues to focus our efforts, however we want to continue this conversation with residents across Suffolk, especially those who live and work within the Air

Quality Management Areas, or those who are particularly vulnerable to the effects of air pollution.

“The county council has identified the importance of this issue and as such has ensured the close working of those working in health and those in highways and other related services. It is essential that we work together to tackle the issue of poor air quality in busy and built-up areas across our county.

“We are continuing to study the impact that traffic in urban areas is having on the air quality, and with this strategy will look to progress actions to ensure the quality of the environment is improved in years to come.”

A key element of the Air Quality Strategy is a public engagement plan which is being developed to increase public awareness of the health impacts of air quality in Suffolk, enabling individuals to make choices that protect both their health and the health of others from the harmful effects of pollution.

The delivery of the strategy will be closely monitored by the council to ensure it is accomplishing what it has set out to do. The strategy will also feed into the collective work of the Health and Wellbeing Board.

June 2023

Suffolk Fire Service to bring control room back to the County

Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service has announced plans to create a new fire control centre here in Suffolk.

Since October 2011, Suffolk has shared a control room with Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Fire and Rescue Service in Huntingdon. The joint project has worked well, saving both fire services money and enabling greater cross-border resource sharing.

However, the company behind a project to deliver a new IT system, initiated in 2019, has run into technical and financial problems, causing a significant delay. This, in addition to advancements in technology, has led to the decision to bring fire control back into the county by the end of 2024.

Councillor Andrew Reid, Cabinet Member for Fire and Public Protection, said:

“We have enjoyed a successful partnership with Cambridgeshire, and it served as a national example of how well sharing resources across counties could work.

“It is time, however, to bring fire control back into our county and under direct Suffolk leadership.

“We are committed to delivering the most effective and efficient services to our residents, and in this case, it is essential that we strive to find and develop a solution which is robust, sustainable and works for Suffolk.”

A new, Suffolk-based control room, with its own market, tried and tested fire engine mobilisation software, will mean modernised IT systems and improved public and firefighter safety in Suffolk.

Jon Lacey, Chief Fire Officer at Suffolk Fire and Rescue, said:

“Following detailed talks with Cambridgeshire the decision has been made to bring fire control back into Suffolk. This decision has not been taken lightly and will take time to implement, however, we are confident it is achievable and the right way forward.

“Clearly a lot of time has gone into our collaborative work to date, so I would like to thank the teams for doing everything they could to make this work.

“Communities in Suffolk will not be impacted by this decision. We remain committed to providing excellent prevention, protection, and response to our residents.”

The proposed new control centre will be brought to Suffolk County Council’s Cabinet for approval in September 2023.

Help for Suffolk Pre-payment Meter customers

A package of support has been created for pre-payment meter customers in Suffolk who are struggling with their energy bills.

Warm Homes Suffolk is a Suffolk-wide Council partnership service, delivering energy efficiency support to low-income households affected by cost-of-living pressures.

Supported by Suffolk's Collaborative Communities Board and funding from Public Health Suffolk's Contain Outbreak Management Fund (COMF), the service is now able to offer specific help for households struggling to pay their energy bills via a pre-payment meter, in addition to its existing support.

The support covers the whole of Suffolk and is available for all residents, whether they are in social housing, council tenants, owner occupiers or private renters.

The Warm Homes Suffolk Service can check eligibility and support applications for grants to increase household energy efficiency, with measures such as loft and wall insulation to air source heat pumps, draught-proofing and more.

It is estimated that more than 24,000 people in Suffolk are pre-payment meter customers.

The service will work with each individual to understand the pressures on their finances and the impact this is having on their lives. The service can carry out a home visit, as well as providing advice over the phone and by email.

The COMF funding of £180,000 will enable this project to run for 12 months to provide the following:

- Income maximisation (through grants and benefits)
- Budgeting advice
- Help understanding bills and heating systems
- Support to reduce energy expenditure (By promoting social tariffs and support to switch suppliers)
- Improving household energy efficiency (By installing insulation, draught proofing, heating systems and solar panels)
- Facilitating switch away from prepaid meters if appropriate

Councillor Bobby Bennett, Suffolk County Council Cabinet Member for Equality and Communities said:

"I am pleased that through the Collaborative Communities Board and Public Health COMF funding, we are able to offer Suffolk residents who use pre-payment meters this help with their energy bills, which will support people financially as well as reduce the Health risks associated with inadequately heated homes. If you are struggling to pay your energy bills or know someone who is, please get in touch."

Pre-payment meter customers who would like support can contact prepay@eastsuffolk.gov.uk to find out more, or call: **Prepay West at 07769 365796**, or **Prepay East at 07769 366229**.

Referrals can be made directly from households, the voluntary sector, and professionals to find prepay households who can benefit from an independent look at their bills.

Warm Homes Suffolk also offers support and advice for residents who are not pre-payment meter customers. To find out more about the support on offer, visit: <https://www.warmhomessuffolk.org/>

Cllr Bobby Bennett added:

“Further details of the cost-of-living support available for Suffolk residents and organisations can be found at www.suffolk.gov.uk/costofliving.”

Ancestry appointed to digitise Suffolk’s popular family and local history sources

More than 400 years of fascinating historical documents held at Suffolk Archives are to be digitised and made available online, thanks to an agreement between Suffolk County Council and Ancestry.

Suffolk Archives will work alongside the family history website Ancestry to create high-quality, full-colour digital images of millions of baptism, marriage and burial records from parishes within the Diocese of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich.

The earliest records being digitised date back to 1538 and include events in the lives of notable historical figures, such as the 1776 baptism of landscape artist John Constable, and the 1846 burial of Thomas Clarkson who devoted his life to the abolition of slavery.

It is hoped that Suffolk’s main parish records will be published online in early 2025 with other collections of local interest to follow. Public access will be free of charge in Suffolk Archives branches or at any Suffolk Library. Anyone with an Ancestry subscription will also be able to access the records as part of their research from their own computer or device.

Cllr Bobby Bennett, Suffolk County Council, Cabinet Member for Equality and Communities said:

“Exploring your family tree has never been more popular and technology is making it easier and more accessible than ever before. This new agreement will lead to more than four centuries of fascinating documents, held by Suffolk Archives, being professionally digitised and made available online on Ancestry. As a result, anyone with Suffolk roots anywhere in the world will be able to learn more about their ancestors at a click of a button.”

Gary Peverley, Acting Diocesan Secretary, Diocese of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich, said:

“Suffolk Archives is the official record office for the diocese, and they store a huge amount of material. This is an exciting project to digitise Suffolk’s parish registers and transcripts with Ancestry. Going forward it will make it easier to draw on the archives and offer improved preservation of the original registers ensuring they are readily available to everyone in the future”.

Further details about the project can be found on the [Suffolk Archives website](#).

£100m broadband investment in Suffolk under government's Project Gigabit

Better broadband is on its way for around 80,000 properties across rural Suffolk in a £100 million investment under a £5 billion government infrastructure programme.

The county is one of three to benefit from Project Gigabit and was chosen to host the launch of the announcement by Minister for Data and Digital Infrastructure, Sir John Whittingdale.

Similar projects were also announced for Norfolk and Hampshire as Sir John was joined in Orford by Suffolk Coastal MP Therese Coffey and Councillor Matthew Hicks, the leader of Suffolk County Council.

Project Gigabit is the government’s £5 billion mission to roll out gigabit-capable, reliable broadband across the UK.

Improved connectivity unlocks new opportunities and fuels innovation, supporting the Prime Minister’s priority of growing the economy by creating better paid jobs.

Around 62,000 homes and businesses in Norfolk stand to benefit from £114 million of Project Gigabit investment, across locations including Buxton, Castle Acre and Horning.

A further 8,000 premises in the northwest of the county are being reviewed for inclusion subject to survey in the next six months.

This project is managed by BDUK who in turn have contracted CityFibre to do the actual work of installing the cabling.

CityFibre, the UK’s largest independent full-fibre provider, will deliver gigabit-capable infrastructure for around 218,000 homes and businesses having secured £318 million of Project Gigabit funding after a competitive process. The provider will also be making a private investment of £170 million to deliver the project.

Decisions on where broadband infrastructure is installed will be made by BDUK and not by SCC.

Survey work in all three counties commences immediately, with the first installations in the New Year and the first live connections expected by summer 2024.

Once connected, residents and businesses will enjoy access to broadband services over a network capable of supporting speeds of up to 10Gbps.

Cllr Matthew Hicks, Leader of Suffolk County Council, said:

"As a rural county, we welcome the announcement of £100m for providing fast, reliable broadband to some 80,000 premises across Suffolk. This will build on our Better Broadband for Suffolk programme which has helped to deliver wider access to superfast broadband.

"Not only will this investment in our digital infrastructure help to keep our residents connected, but, since many of Suffolk's small businesses are operated from households across the county, it is essential for the future of the local economy."

July

Councils set out concerns as public consultation opens for Norwich to Tilbury proposals

National Grid has opened its consultation to anyone wishing to comment on its Norwich to Tilbury proposal, previously known as East Anglia Green. This is an eight-week non-statutory consultation period which closes on 21 August 2023.

The project will see a new 400kV electricity transmission line built between Norwich and Tilbury, running a distance of 111 miles. It will be made up mostly of overhead lines and pylons, along with some underground cables and a new substation.

The new consultation reveals the route for the pylons, passing through Norfolk, Suffolk, and Essex. It shows the line will run underground through the Dedham Vale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty on the Essex-Suffolk border.

The consultation is open to residents, landowners, businesses and any individuals or groups that may be interested in commenting on the revised proposals. Consultees can participate online or via face-to-face events.

Essex County Council, Norfolk County Council and Suffolk County Council are also being consulted on the proposals as statutory consultees. All three councils have already raised concerns to the initial consultation undertaken last year.

Councillor Richard Rout, Suffolk County Council's Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Environment, said:

"We must be looking to a coordinated offshore centred approach to energy transmission in the UK. Given our long-term energy security goals and the infrastructure that will be required, simply installing more pylons, and digging trenches cannot be the only viable solution. We will continue to stand strong on behalf of all the communities who will be affected by these proposals."

You can read more about the Norwich to Tilbury project and view a calendar of consultation events on the [National Grid website](#). You can also comment on the proposals by:

- completing National Grid's [online feedback form](#)
- sending a completed paper feedback form to Freepost N TO T (no stamp or further address needed)
- completing a paper feedback form at one of the [consultation events](#)
- emailing your comments to contact@n-t.nationalgrid.com

Norfolk and Suffolk councils given authority and funding to help nature's recovery

Suffolk and Norfolk County Councils have been formally appointed by Government as responsible authorities for preparing a Local Nature Recovery Strategy for their respective counties.

This means that they will be working together to help improve wildlife habitats and reverse the decline of biodiversity across the region, working with local communities to develop a tailored nature recovery strategy for their areas.

They will also work with other local planning authorities, the Broads Authority, Natural England, and a wide range of stakeholders and partners, including farming and landowner groups.

This is all part of Government's ambition to further drive nature recovery, with 48 individual local authorities across the country receiving allocations from a £14 million funding pot. Norfolk and Suffolk County Councils will receive £333,000 and £282,000 respectively over two years to fund this work. With the best ways to support nature recovery depending on local character and geography, Local Nature Recovery Strategies will help communities map out the action needed in their area to restore nature.

The Norfolk and Suffolk councils have already been working closely with each other, jointly hosting the Norfolk and Suffolk Nature Recovery Partnership, and a host of other stakeholders and interested parties to prepare for this moment. The two authorities have pooled resources and expertise and to ensure that strategies effectively join up across the two counties to the wider benefit of nature and people.

The Strategies will focus on how to improve habitats and protect the natural environment across the region, with local approaches tailored to the specific circumstances of each area. Norfolk and Suffolk are home to a variety of beautiful and unique landscapes, from the chalk streams of the Norfolk Coast to the Stour estuary at the southeast of Suffolk and across many habitats in between, and specific policies will be drawn up to best protect and nurture each location.

Future plans will include working closely with other neighbouring counties, to identify and support opportunities for nature recovery at sufficient scale to really benefit wildlife.

Councillor Richard Rout, Suffolk County Council's Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Environment, said:

"Protecting and enhancing the environment is one of our core priorities and we know how important it is to our residents. Nature is critical to everything we do and value – the air we breathe, the water we drink, the soils we grow food on. It is essential to many of our businesses, attracts people and investment to the county and is vital to people's health and wellbeing.

“SCC has made ambitious commitments to restore nature across our estate and through services such as highways, and I welcome this opportunity for us to work with everyone else who cares about and can help nature recovery in Suffolk to develop an ambitious but achievable strategy to achieve that.”

Suffolk receives £1.49m funding for walking and cycling pilot

Suffolk County Council has received more than £1 million from the government to fund participation in a national pilot scheme to promote cycling and walking as part of a more active lifestyle.

The county is receiving £1,495,506 over three years as one of 11 local authorities taking part in the £13.9 million Active Travel England social prescribing scheme.

Social prescribing is a national pilot scheme to promote cycling and walking as part of a more active lifestyle.

The project, launched in August 2022, is helping councils run trials to evaluate the impact of active travel on an individual’s physical and mental health, such as through reduced demand for healthcare appointments and reliance on medication due to more physical activity.

This also includes allowing doctors and health workers to prescribe walking and cycling to improve patients’ physical and mental health.

As the scheme progresses, GP surgeries in the pilot areas of Ipswich and Lowestoft will be invited to take part.

Work is already underway with Suffolk and North East Essex Integrated Care Board and Suffolk Information Partnership to link some referral systems.

Suffolk will use its funding for projects that will see patients in parts of Ipswich and Lowestoft offered free access to guided walks, cycle training and bike loans.

Introductory walk and cycle groups are taking place now on Friday mornings in Ipswich at Murray Park and Holywells Park. In Lowestoft, they are operating from Normanston Park.

These will be available through July and August, with participants offered 1-1 journey planning, 1-1 buddy walking, or cycling and bike maintenance training.

From September, walking and cycling groups will take place across Ipswich at Whitton, Chantry, Gainsborough, Wherstead and Central Ipswich.

In Lowestoft they will be taking place at the Seafront, Normanston Park, Nicholas Everett Park and Sparrows Nest. Other venues will develop as the pilot progresses.

There will be varying levels of activity depending on health needs, with each activity lasting up to 90 minutes with a rest break and free drink in a local café.

There will be plenty of rest stops based on the needs of the participants. Equipment can be provided to include walking aids, bicycles, or e-bikes.

All activities are led by experienced and qualified cycle and walk leaders.

Later in the year other activities are planned in the form of community events, themed walks, or cycle rides, cycling courses and a digital walking app featuring challenges and treasure hunts focused on the areas of Ipswich and Lowestoft.

Councillor Alexander Nicoll, Suffolk County Council Deputy Cabinet Member for Transport Strategy, said:

“This is an innovative trial scheme and one we are looking forward to exploring the potential of now that we have received funding.

“The benefits of good health and well-being are already well-known. Helping people to achieve it through walking and cycling is not only good news for them but also for the wider community thanks to less road traffic and cleaner air.”

Participants within the target areas can be referred through a GP or voluntary group or a self-referral by contacting thewaytogosuffolk@suffolk.gov.uk or calling 01473 260060.

For more details about the scheme go the [Way To Go Suffolk](#) website.

Suffolk County Council has also received £545,528 over three years from the Government’s Capability Fund to develop and invest in cycling initiatives.

This includes setting up an accessible cycling scheme in Stowmarket for those unable to use a bicycle and working with a selection of organisations offering their staff a free six-week e-bike trial - [launched with Associated British Ports at Port of Ipswich last November](#) - and which now has almost 30 bikes on trial around the county.

Suffolk’s Archive Service Achieves Full National Accreditation

The service achieved Provisional Accreditation in March 2019 and today the UK Archive Service Accreditation Committee has moved Suffolk Archives from provisional to full accreditation status.

Accreditation is the UK quality standard which recognises good performance in all areas of archive service delivery. Achieving accredited status demonstrates that Suffolk Archives has met clearly defined national standards relating to management and resourcing; the care of its unique collections and the service it offers to a broad range of users.

Archive Service Accreditation is supported by a partnership of the Archives and Records Association (UK), Archives and Records Council Wales, National Records of Scotland, Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, Scottish Council on Archives, The National Archives, and the Welsh Government through its Museums, Archives and Libraries Wales division.

The Accreditation Panels are composed of Committee members nominated by the seven Accreditation partners and openly recruited from the archives sector.

The Archive Service Accreditation Panel “supported the move to full accreditation following the successful move to new premises at Ipswich. The Panel commended the determined efforts made by Suffolk Archives in developing and delivering community engagement across the county.”

Councillor Bobby Bennett, Suffolk County Council’s Cabinet Member for Equality and Communities, said:

“We are delighted that Suffolk’s archive services have achieved full accreditation following detailed submissions and inspection from UK Archive Service Accreditation Committee. Suffolk Archives preserves our local history so that people of all ages and backgrounds can discover more about their heritage, and this national accreditation formally recognises the important work they do. Suffolk’s local communities can be assured that their heritage is in good hands.”

August 2023

Formal opening of £1.3 million Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service training centre

The Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service Training Centre at Wattisham Flying Station near Stowmarket has recently undergone a £1.3 million upgrade.

It now boasts a tactical firefighting facility, which uses real fire and an LPG-fired facility to simulate incidents firefighters may be faced with.

The most recent addition is the modular office complex, which features additional classrooms and welfare facilities for all delegates and staff.

The centre was formally declared open at the annual base families' day on Thursday August 24 by Chief Fire Officer (CFO) Jon Lacey of Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service, and Colonel Toby R Moore MBE, Station Commander, Wattisham Flying Station.

Chief Fire Officer, Jon Lacey, said:

"This is an exciting new chapter for the training centre, which has been at Wattisham now for over a decade.

"Our new training centre provides additional classrooms and office space, supporting various aspects of fire and rescue training, such as incident command.

"It also provides improved welfare facilities, which was designed to bring everyone together in an atmosphere where they feel they belong.

"Similarly, the new training complexes allow us to give new firefighters the best training possible in a way that is realistic yet less harmful to the environment, through us not having to use as much carbon-based burning material as before."

Councillor Andrew Reid, Suffolk County Council Cabinet Member for Public Health and Public Protection and chair of the Suffolk Fire Authority said:

"The work of the fire service is vital in protecting our community and often requires them to undertake hazardous work in extremely demanding conditions.

"Our firefighters deserve the best possible training to prepare them for such work and this facility will offer exactly that for many years to come."

The fire service training centre has been at Wattisham since 2011 and occupies a 17-acre site that previously housed the Bloodhound missile system from the Cold War.

The training centre is used throughout the year for a wide range of training requirements which include refresher and ongoing assessments by all staff.

Council fears new energy proposals will harm Suffolk's coastline

Suffolk County Council is disappointed to learn that the LionLink interconnector project from National Grid Ventures has identified an alternative landfall at Walberswick, with cable routing making its way to the north of Southwold.

The Council will study the details of the new proposals, and will prepare its response to the National Grid's second public consultation, which opens on 8 September.

Councillor Richard Rout, Suffolk County Council's Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Environment, said:

"I'm deeply disappointed that National Grid has chosen to consider such a lengthy and complex cable route. Particularly given the Council's longstanding position that the array of projects coming forward in Suffolk should be properly coordinated.

"The impact of these proposals on communities in and around Southwold and Walberswick could be stark and I'm concerned that coordinating this project with schemes further to the south seems to have been so readily dismissed.

"The large amount of infrastructure and lack of coordination will spread the impact much more widely across Suffolk's communities and landscapes, including in the nationally important Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty."

The Lionlink project aims to connect multiple offshore wind farms in the North Sea, instead of individual wind farms connecting one by one to the shore. The project is a joint venture between the UK and the Netherlands, supplying energy to both countries.

Cllr Rout continues:

"If National Grid Ventures are to bring this project ashore in Suffolk, they must fully justify why far less harmful alternatives have not been fully considered and why they are not working with other projects in the area."

"We welcome that some points like traffic concerns have been addressed from the previous consultation, and that coordination with other projects is being explored. But the project must go much further if it is serious about working with other energy developers.

"The Council will need to consider the full proposals when they are published and, as ever, if it proceeds we will be insisting the developer does everything they can to minimise the impact on communities along Suffolk's coast."

The non-statutory consultation on [National Grid Venture's LionLink project](#) will commence on the 8 September 2023, and will remain open until 3 November 2023.

September

Inflation, SEND school transport and care costs contribute to council's predicted overspend

Inflation, school transport for children with SEND, and looking after children in care are the main factors for SCC forecasting to spend £22.3m over its £688.1m budget for this year.

This is a similar story for many councils across the country, due to higher demand for their services, inflation remaining higher than expected for longer, and interest rates rising to levels not forecast by financial markets.

[Recent research by the County Councils Network](#) suggests that England's largest councils will need to make at least £1bn in savings to balance their current 2023/24 budgets.

A [BBC investigation](#) also reported that councils expect to be £5.2bn short of balancing budgets by April 2026, the average council facing a £33m predicted deficit by 2025-26.

Suffolk County Council projects a 4% overspend (£29.3m), to be partially offset by an additional Section 31 grant from Government, and additional income from the pooling of business rates with the district and borough councils in Suffolk, totalling £7m.

Councillor Richard Rout, Suffolk County Council's Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Environment, said:

"Despite being able to publish a balanced budget in February, we are already having to spend more than we anticipated this year.

"We set this year's budget during a period of highly uncertain economic conditions. Even although the country is now starting to see price rises slowing and energy costs beginning to drop we are still suffering the cost impacts of various global shocks - in particular COVID-19 and the war in Ukraine.

"We are experiencing unexpectedly high demands on certain services, meaning some are spending disproportionately more than others. For example, costs for school transport and children in care make up two-thirds of the total overspend."

Details of the main areas of overspend are:

- **School transport** - forecast to overspend by £11.4m (39% of the overspend), with £8.3m of this being travel costs for children with special education needs and

disabilities (SEND). This is largely due to more children with SEND needs, transport operators being in limited supply, and rising costs from those operators who are also feeling the impacts of inflation, especially fuel costs.

- **Children in care** - forecast to overspend by £8.2m (28% of the overspend). The council has a responsibility to provide care for children and young people under the age of 18. Some of these have incredibly complex needs requiring 24-hour care from multiple carers. There is currently an unexpectedly higher number of children requiring this support, with this costing an average of £22,700 per week, per child.
- **Adult care services** - forecast to overspend by £3.5m (12% of the overspend) for purchasing care, due to increases in demand, and staffing costs in the sector. The fees paid for residential and nursing placements remain high with 64% of new residential and nursing packages being above the published rate of £806 per week, with some specialist packages being over £1,500 per week.
- **Inflation** - inflation and interest rates have been higher than experienced in a generation, with the legacy of COVID-19 continuing to have a significant impact of on various services. As an example, there is an estimated £3.0m (10% of the overspend) pressure as pay settlements continue to be above historical norms as inflation has remained stubbornly high during 2023 so far. High interest rates mean it has been more costly than anticipated to borrow money, which the council does to help fund big projects, such as upgrading highways, maintaining schools or developing household recycling centres.

In addition to the net overspend of £22.3m from this main budget, the council is forecasting an overspend of £15.8m against its £256.5m budget from the Dedicated Schools Grant and Pupil Premium Grant. This is money from Government specifically to fund schools and services for pupils. This overspend comes solely from resources spent on Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) provision, not including school transport. Suffolk, like many other local authorities, is seeing a continuous increase in demand which is not being met by the same level of increase in funding.

Despite these challenges, council departments continue to make savings. This year's budget identified £25.1m of savings to be made, and the latest figures show that £20m of this is projected to be achieved.

Councillor Richard Rout continues:

"Our officers continue to do great work for Suffolk residents, including providing complex levels of support to those most in need, whilst making savings.

"But with these increasing demands and costs, we are seeing councils around the country having to reduce services and put spending freezes in place, so that they can balance their budgets for this year. Unfortunately, we must now have these discussions too.

“For many years, we have made savings through our transformation programmes – essentially ways of working smarter and leaner whilst still delivering services. We have also built up an appropriate level of reserves, meaning we have savings which we are able to call upon now.

“But this is not sustainable and now that Cabinet has been presented with the council’s first financial report for this year, we will work with directors to help reduce this predicted overspend.”

The Cabinet at Suffolk County Council will discuss the Q1 2023-24 Revenue Budget paper, at its meeting on 12 September 2023. [Cabinet papers are published on the Suffolk County Council website.](#)

Councils unite against National Grid pylon proposals

In a [joint letter to National Grid](#), the leaders of the three councils address the extensive impact on landscapes and local communities that the scheme would bring.

They also highlight that an offshore solution has not been sufficiently investigated, and the opportunities that this could bring to co-ordinate with other large-scale energy projects off the region’s coast.

The Norwich to Tilbury project would see 114 miles of electricity pylons weave their way through the three counties. Only a small percentage of this cabling would go underground, an issue which the councils also raise, stating that more would be needed particularly in the Dedham Vale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and near Diss and the Waveney Valley.

Councillor Kevin Bentley, Leader of Essex County Council, said:

“We have taken to writing at this time, as there is still the opportunity to explore all options and solutions for a development of this scale. We all support the collective effort to tackle climate change, work towards net zero and to create a secure future for the country’s energy. But there are so many elements of this proposal which just do not go far enough.”

Councillor Kay Mason Billig, Leader of Norfolk County Council, said:

“The impact that this scheme would have should not be underestimated, particularly on the region’s unique, designated landscapes and the many communities that will be affected. We all agree that studies into an offshore solution have not been appropriately explored, this is a viable option which we feel has been dismissed too readily.”

Councillor Matthew Hicks, Leader of Suffolk County Council, said:

“Should proposals for the project progress, and further consultations take place, we would expect National Grid to invest a lot more time and effort in working with our local communities. These large schemes can be guilty of doing the minimum necessary when they should be working with local people and businesses as much as possible, who know the area and can help find the best solutions, should the project go ahead.”

National Grid held a second, non-statutory consultation, which closed on 21 August 2023. It is expected that a statutory consultation will take place in 2024.

October 2023

New highways services arrive in Suffolk as multi-million-pound partnership goes live

The new contract, which is worth in the region of £800 million - £1 billion, will deliver highway projects and improvements across Suffolk for up to 20 years, including maintaining roads, pavements and rights of way, improving drainage, hedge trimming, construction of new road schemes, snow-clearing and gritting and much more.

Milestone Infrastructure, part of M Group Services, was awarded Suffolk's new highways services contract back in February and since then has been working with Suffolk County Council to mobilise the new contract ahead of it commencing on 1 October.

When seeking a new highways partner, the county council wanted a keener focus on delivering greater social value, building on the council's commitment to carbon reduction and protecting the environment, using local skills and talent, and giving young people the opportunity to work in the sector.

With this in mind, the new partnership was built around six key contract objectives, which will form the basis for all that Suffolk Highways delivers going forward. These objectives are:

- Collaboration and Partnership
- Social Value
- Environment and Net Zero Carbon
- Customer Communication and Engagement
- Commercialism and Enterprise
- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

Councillor Paul West, Suffolk County Council's Cabinet Member for Ipswich, Operational Highways and Flooding, said:

"I am delighted to welcome our new highways partner, Milestone, to Suffolk. There has been a great deal of work taking place over the past few months to ensure we were ready to start the new partnership on 1 October whilst continuing to deliver services to our residents.

"As highways services tend to impact all those living, working or travelling in our county; it was essential we found the best possible fit for what was needed here in Suffolk.

"I want to take this opportunity to thank everyone involved in successfully procuring, awarding and mobilising this new contract, whilst continuing to keep our county safe and moving."

To read about the new Suffolk Streetlighting contract with McCann, visit: [Go Live! Suffolk County Council Street Lighting Services Contract Gets Underway - McCann \(mccann-ltd.co.uk\)](https://www.mccann-ltd.co.uk)

Statement following funding announcement for Ely and Haughley rail junctions

The Government has announced funding for upgrades to Ely and Haughley rail junctions.

Councillor Richard Smith MVO, Suffolk County Council Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Transport Strategy and Waste, said:

“This is really excellent news for Suffolk. The infrastructure at these junctions currently lacks capacity for the demand from freight and passenger traffic. This investment will reduce those constraints and allow more trains to run through Ely and Haughley, including freight on rail out of Felixstowe and more passenger services between Ipswich and Peterborough.

“This will ease congestion on our roads, help us on our journey towards net zero by reducing carbon emissions and provide a significant boost to the local economy.”

Developers risk "treating Suffolk communities with contempt" as the latest round of large-scale energy projects in Suffolk emerge

Energy developers who are bringing forward large-scale energy projects without speaking to councils or communities, were criticised heavily today (October 11th) by Councillor Richard Rout, Deputy Leader of Suffolk County Council and Cabinet member for Finance and the Environment, following the latest publication of National Grid's Transmission Entry Capacity (TEC) Register.

The TEC Register is a list of projects, which often end up as large nationally significant infrastructure projects (called NSIPs), that have secured the right to connect to National Grid's network if they are consented, under the Planning Act 2008 by government, not local councils. These connection offers, which form a legally binding contract with National Grid, are routinely published and made, prior to the development and consenting of electricity generation or storage projects.

The current list of connection offers published by National Grid shows that new projects have been offered connections at National Grid's sites in Suffolk, at Bramford near Ipswich, and at Yaxley, near Eye, in north Suffolk. These new projects are large-scale solar panel and battery storage proposals in the same style as the recent SUNNICA scheme in West Suffolk, which is a proposal to create a 2500-acre Solar Farm on the Suffolk Cambridgeshire border.

Councillor Richard Rout, Deputy Leader of Suffolk County Council, and Cabinet Member for Finance and the Environment said:

“It is both shocking and disappointing to me that councils and communities in Suffolk are finding out about these very large proposals for the first time in this way. Suffolk County Council has not been approached by any of the businesses that have had a connection offer from National Grid, and neither have the communities, who will be expected to host these huge schemes. When you consider that a connection offer from National Grid forms a legally binding contract with developers, it is simply inexplicable to me that such a contract could exist without anyone locally being made aware, by the developer, of their proposals. In my view, this treats the opinions of local people, and their council representatives, with contempt and is a terrible way to begin projects of this nature. Any of these projects, if they do come forward and are submitted to the planning inspectorate for planning permission, have serious implications for local people, our county's infrastructure, our agricultural capacity and heritage, not to mention our precious natural environment and wildlife habitats.”

Suffolk County Council, which is recognised by the Government as a centre of excellence when it comes to managing the impacts of big energy schemes, has previously outlined its concerns over the way large energy developers treat communities. In July this year, Cllr Rout wrote to the Secretary of State for Levelling up, Housing and Communities, Rt Hon Michael Gove MP, to outline the significant shortfalls of the West Suffolk SUNNICA application, described as "the worst example of what can go wrong" when developers mistreat local communities.

Cllr. Rout continued:

“Suffolk County Council readily understands and accepts the extent and magnitude of the infrastructure required to deliver national energy independence. However, food security is equally important, and we have grave concerns about taking vast swathes of high-quality agricultural land out of food production for solar farms. It is absolutely critical that projects, like those emerging for the first time today, are handled in the right way and treat local people with the respect they deserve. Any attempt to sneak projects through the back door or avoid early meaningful engagement with communities is simply not good enough, and I will continue to call it out when I see it happening.”

These projects can now be brought forward by the respective developers for consideration under the NSIP programme and, if they meet the criteria, will be considered by the planning inspectorate for approval in due course. Due to the size of these proposals being like the SUNNICA proposal, if they do come forward, their planning applications will be ultimately decided by central government, not local councils.

Council urges communities to respond to Sea Link consultation

Suffolk County Council is preparing its response to proposals for a significant off-shore electricity connection which could affect Saxmundham and Aldeburgh. It is encouraging local residents and businesses to do the same.

Sea Link is a proposal for a new 2 gigawatt subsea high voltage direct current electricity connection developed by National Grid Electricity Transmission. It is approximately 140km in length and predominately offshore.

A [statutory consultation](#) opened to the public on 24 October, and closes on 18 December 2023.

The council remains concerned about the lack of coordination with this, and other offshore energy projects such as Nautilus and Lionlink. It also fears for the impact on local coastal communities and the environment.

Plans for Sea Link include:

- a connection from the existing transmission network via the consented, but as yet unbuilt, Friston Substation
- landfall on the Suffolk coast between Aldeburgh and Thorpeness
- a 2 GW high voltage direct current (HVDC) converter station up to 26 metres high plus external equipment (such as lightning protection & railings for walkways) near Saxmundham
- a high voltage alternating current (HVAC) underground cable of approximately 1.7 km in length between the proposed Friston Substation and the proposed converter station
- 10 km of HVDC underground cable between Saxmundham, and a transition joint bay (TJB) approximately 900 m inshore from a landfall point between Aldeburgh and Thorpeness

Councillor Richard Rout, Suffolk County Council's Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Environment, said:

"We have been raising our concerns at the highest level, stressing that all these energy projects off Suffolk's coast need to be aligned to reduce their impact on the county. The coordination of cabling, landing points and construction is essential – anything short of this, we find unacceptable.

"The impact of the Sea Link proposals on local communities should not be underestimated, which would see miles of underground cabling, landfall on our coastline and a large converter station built near Saxmundham, which would be taller than the iconic House in the Clouds in nearby Thorpeness.

"We support the government's drive for energy security, but will not stand for the bare minimum mitigations that developers can apply to projects of this scale, which show little consideration for local communities.

"I would urge local residents and businesses to join us in sharing their worries and concerns about the coordination of these projects, and the potential impacts of Sea Link on the local landscape and natural environment."

In December 2022, the council submitted [a 58-page response](#) to NGET's non-statutory consultation, outlining its concerns to the initial Sea Link proposals. It will continue to engage with National Grid to achieve best possible outcomes for the communities and the environment.

For more information, see below:

Sea Link information on National Grid website:

<https://www.nationalgrid.com/electricity-transmission/network-and-infrastructure/infrastructure-projects/sealink>

Suffolk County Council's responses to Sea Link:

<https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/planning-waste-and-environment/major-infrastructure-projects/nationally-significant-infrastructure-projects-nsips/national-grid-electricity-generation-sea-link>

New fund delivers digital boost for Suffolk

Almost £250,000 of funding was announced at an event today (October 25th), giving a boost to the county's ambitions to reduce the number of people excluded from the benefits of digital technology.

Suffolk County Council has contributed £100,000, with £143,000 coming from District and Borough Council funding, earmarked for digital inclusion projects.

Suffolk's Digital Inclusion Fund will be open to bidders from early November for initiatives that will support people of all ages, but particularly those who are at risk of being disadvantaged by being excluded from accessing digital support and information.

The fund has been created as a collaboration between Suffolk County Council, district and borough councils, voluntary and private sector partners and Suffolk Community Foundation. It is a direct result of Suffolk County Council's Policy Development Panel, held in 2022, which recommended a series of actions to reduce digital poverty and its effects in Suffolk.

The event called on key partners to support the new fund, making a further commitment to playing their part in the ambition for a digitally enabled Suffolk. Prospective bidders are encouraged to apply through Suffolk Community Foundation's website www.suffolkcf.org.uk

Evidence suggests that by not having the skills or the means to use online services – everything from online shopping, looking up important information and advice and using transactional services such as applying for bus passes – people are at risk of poorer health, reduced income and even a lower life expectancy.

In 2021, Healthwatch Suffolk, who participated in the event, co-produced principles for digital health and care. These principles provide important guidance for organisations intending to deliver health or social care services using digital to ensure people have a meaningful choice over how and when they access information and it is available to them in the format they need.

Councillor Bobby Bennett, Cabinet Member for Equality and Communities, said:

“I’m delighted to launch the new Digital Inclusion Fund for Suffolk. Through this fund we can support projects which will make a real difference in increasing digital inclusion in our county. From online shopping to applying for a bus pass, we are moving more and more towards digital solutions in our everyday lives. We want to make sure people are not left behind, whether that’s through improving access to more affordable broadband, building vital life skills or providing additional support. This is an exciting opportunity to support more people in Suffolk to benefit from digital technology and work to address poor health outcomes linked to digital exclusion.”

Councillor Philip Faircloth-Mutton, Deputy Cabinet Member for Transformation, who led the 2022 Policy Development Panel, said:

“Today’s fund launch is a fantastic example of putting recommendations into action. The Policy Development Panel wanted to supply the impetus for local projects to make increased digital inclusion a reality, by offering funding to organisations and groups who know their communities best. This is a practical commitment of Suffolk County Council empowering local people in local communities right across the county. It is just the start of what I hope will be a transformative process that will make a difference to Suffolk people’s lives.”

Speakers at the event included Cllr Bobby Bennett, Cllr Faircloth-Mutton, Stuart Keeble, Director of Public Health, Nick Khan, Strategic Director at East Suffolk Council and Andy Yacoub, Chief Executive of Healthwatch Suffolk, Melanie Craig, Chief Executive Officer of Suffolk Community Foundation and Tim Holder, Director of Development and Communications at Suffolk Community Foundation.

Healthwatch Suffolk’s **Digital Care and Health: Guiding principles for health and social care providers and commissioners planning or delivering digital care in Suffolk and northeast Essex** is available at www.healthwatchsuffolk.co.uk

November

Cabinet approved £10 million new funding to resurface residential roads

At Suffolk County Council's Cabinet meeting (7th November), Cabinet approved an extra £10 million to repair and resurface local roads in villages and residential areas across Suffolk.

The funding will nearly double Suffolk Highways' £11 million annual road maintenance budget but be targeted at smaller residential streets which are typically maintained less frequently than busier A and B roads.

Over recent years, the county council has recognised the importance of improving roads for residents, this new proposal follows the successful £21 million contribution towards the resurfacing of 1,000 miles of road between 2017 and 2021, and more recently the committed £21 million between 2021 – 2025 to increase pavement maintenance, deliver drainage improvement schemes and repair road signs.

It is hoped that the extra £10 million boost to resurface some local roads, minor rural roads and urban cul-de-sacs would result in a reduction of new potholes, which in turn will reduce the overall financial burden on the council's emergency and reactive repair budgets. Between 2020 and 2023, 2 out of 3 pothole repairs were carried out on local roads, minor rural roads, and urban cul-de-sacs. During that period, more than half of all defects reported by the public were on these types of roads.

The extra investment will make use of more sustainable materials such as warm mix asphalts that have a lower CO2 footprint than traditional hot mix asphalts and which include recycled materials to reduce raw material use; resulting in a more positive impact on Suffolk's environment.

Councillor Paul West, Suffolk County Council's Cabinet Member for Ipswich, Operational Highways and Flooding, said:

"This major investment looks set to improve roads across the county where people live. These smaller roads are often in estates or off the beaten track in our villages and are in need of some love and attention.

"By investing in resurfacing these types of roads, rather than repairing them when potholes appear, it aims to reduce ongoing maintenance costs, our carbon footprint and disruption on our roads. It also aims to encourage more people to consider sustainable ways of getting about, such as walking and cycling.

"Our highways teams are currently prioritising sites and identifying the roads which we will target with this investment. If the extra investment is agreed we will look to deliver this larger programme of works over the course of the next year."

Government backs A12 road improvements with funding commitment

The government has confirmed (on 31st October) funding for a transformative package of improvements as part of Suffolk County Council's A12 Major Road Network scheme.

The scheme will see upgrades to the key roundabouts from the A14 at Seven Hills, east of Ipswich, north to the A1152 at Woods Lane, and a new dual carriageway section replacing the existing single carriageway bottleneck at Seckford Hall between the B1438 and B1079.

It will also deliver improvements to bus links and walking and cycling connections to reduce the issue of severance for communities on either side of the A12 – for example, where the A12 separates houses from local employment and retail areas.

The Department for Transport has committed to funding up to £ 54 million of the scheme's estimated £ 64 million total cost. The remainder of the cost will be funded by local development contributions, including from Sizewell C and Brightwell Lakes.

Cllr Richard Smith MVO, Suffolk County Council Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Transport Strategy and Waste, said:

"Suffolk County Council has fought long and hard for this scheme, so I am pleased that the government has announced its commitment to fund most of the cost of the project. These improvements will future-proof the A12 and deliver major benefits to local communities and to people travelling around Suffolk, the road being a link between our two largest towns, Ipswich and Lowestoft.

"Also, it is a critical bottleneck in accessing the East Suffolk coast, which is the location of several Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs), including Sizewell C. This funding will allow us to meet the timescales of Sizewell C and minimise congestion and network disruption during its construction.

"I would like to thank the government for recognising the importance of this scheme, the positive impacts of which will be far-reaching."

Extra £108 million for Suffolk's roads welcomed

Suffolk County Council has welcomed the Government announcement - which is part of a Department for Transport plan to pump £609 million into highway maintenance in the East of England. £107,590,000 has been ringfenced for Suffolk over the next decade, including £3.4 million in this financial year.

Councillor Paul West, Suffolk County Council's Cabinet Member for Ipswich, Operational Highways and Flooding, said:

"Today's news is extremely welcome and will certainly help us to make Suffolk's road better for everyone. We still need to understand the detail in full. But so far, what we know is very positive and will make a significant difference to our road network."

The funding is part of the Government's Network North plan, with money redirected from HS2 funding. Transport Secretary Mark Harper MP today set out his £8.3billion national long-term plan to resurface 5,000 miles of roads across the country.

Other projects in the East of England set to benefit from the Network North money includes the transformation of the Ely Junction to give an extra six freight trains per day access to the Port of Felixstowe and [upgrades to key roundabouts on the A12, from Seven Hills to Woods Lane](#). A new dual-carriageway section will be built to replace the existing single-carriageway bottleneck at Seckford Hall between the B1438 and B1079.

4.7 million litres of water and 8,412 drains cleared since Storm Babet battered Suffolk one month ago

4.7 million litres of water have been pumped away and 8,412 highways drains cleared of post-storm debris since Storm Babet first hit Suffolk.

The scale of work undertaken since the storm includes:

- Clearing and jetting of 8,412 drains
- Removing 121 trees blocking roads
- Cleared flood water from 198 locations
- Repairing 1,200 road and pavement potholes
- Contacting landowners about blocked private watercourses and roadside ditches, which are generally their responsibility to maintain.

The areas worst hit by the storm, including Debenham, Framlingham, Needham Market and Cavendish have all had their drains blitzed to clear tonnes of silt, leaves and other debris that has been washing into them as flood waters have subsided.

After drains are cleared, water from large tankers is run through them to check they are operating and if they are not, high pressure jets can be brought in to clear any blockages. In extreme cases, cameras are used to locate hidden blockages and then work is scheduled to dig up the pipes and fix the issues.

Councillor Steve Wiles, Deputy Cabinet Member for Highways Drainage and now also providing an additional focus on wider flood prevention post-storm Babet, said:

["Storm Babet was an exceptional and sustained downpour, with water running off fields and overwhelming riverbanks and roadside ditches, and exceeding the capacity of road drains as more than a month's worth of average rainfall for East Anglia fell in just 24 to 36 hours.](#)

["The deluge of rain has needed significant additional work to clear and I am thankful to our highways staff for their hard work, especially in the areas worst hit.](#)

["There is a significant amount of work being done by our district and borough council colleagues to help residents recover from the floods, including making payments from the Government's](#)

flood relief programme. Eligible residents will start receiving grants and council tax discounts during November.

“In the coming months and years, there will be much work for councils, emergency services and residents to ensure they are as prepared as possible for extreme weather.”

Suffolk County Council is also pumping an extra £10 million into drain and gully clearing projects.

135 drainage sites were addressed during 2022/23 and 89 new projects are currently in the design phase with the county council’s new highways partner Milestone. This is in addition to Suffolk’s annual drain clearing programme which saw 111,000 drains cleared last year.

The county council has also gathered over 800 reports of flooding to homes and businesses, to enable owners to access funding from the Government. Suffolk councils are working together, with Suffolk County Council collecting information and assessing the reports, and the district and borough councils distributing the funding to eligible property owners.

Eligible residents who experienced exceptional property flooding during Storm Babet and have reported this to the county council, will start receiving financial support during November.

Suffolk County Council’s Adult Social Care service rated Good overall by Care Quality Commission

Suffolk County Council has been awarded an indicative overall rating of “Good” for the quality of its Adult Social Care services.

Following a period of intense inspection by the Care Quality Commission (CQC), Suffolk County Council has become one of the first councils nationwide to achieve this standard.

Earlier this year CQC announced that 5 local authorities with responsibility for adult social care, including Suffolk, had volunteered to be part of a Local Authority Assessment Pilot, to help CQC develop the new model of inspection to help assess councils against the requirements of the Care Act. This model would then be rolled out across the country with all 153 Local Authorities with responsibility for Adult Social Care being inspected by the commission.

The assessment process began this summer with a request for information to each local authority taking part in the pilot. This collected the written evidence needed to allow CQC to understand how each council is delivering its adult social care services. Following on from this initial ask, the County Council was then required to arrange over 40 different meetings including 4 staff drop-in sessions, with over 150 people, including staff, partners, providers, carers, and people with lived experiences. These meetings allowed the CQC inspection team to meet people directly and ask questions to help further evidence the quality of social care services provided.

CQC's final report rated the overall quality of Suffolk County Council's Adult Social Care services as "Good" and highlighted areas of strength including, the quality of its leadership, the culture of learning and support for staff, the range of digital care options available, the good relationships between social care and health colleagues and locality team knowledge and understanding of community needs.

Councillor Beccy Hopfensperger, Cabinet Member for Adult Care at Suffolk County Council, said:

"I am delighted, this is a fantastic result for Suffolk County Council, especially for those colleagues working within Adult Social Care.

"I am especially pleased to see areas like Safeguarding rated as good, this is a real acknowledgement of the hard work SCC and partners have put in place over the last few years to learn from every incident and work closely together as a system to ensure the safety of the most vulnerable in our community.

"I believe this rating is also a testament to the high levels of financial investment we as a council have consistently put into Adult Social Care over the years, especially during the dark days of the pandemic, and shows how through imagination and service transformation, we are delivering on our priority to put people's health and wellbeing at the top of our agenda as a local authority.

"Of course, there is always more that can be done with something as complex as Adult Social Care and we certainly won't take this overall rating for granted. There are challenges ahead which this report touches upon, but what this rating ultimately should do is give us all confidence that we have the right people and processes in place to provide good quality Adult Social Care services for the people of Suffolk."

James Bullion, CQC's chief inspector of adult social care and integrated care, said:

"At this assessment of Suffolk's health and social care services, CQC found dedicated and resilient front-line staff who were committed to delivering high-quality care and support. They were supported by effective leaders who had created a positive culture and used data to inform strategic decisions and drive action.

"People shared the positive experiences they had using the local authority's services, saying they were compassionate, flexible, and focused on their individual needs.

"It was also encouraging to see Suffolk County Council's integration with local health partners, and the clear focus they all had on prevention. It was exciting to see them working on innovative approaches in this area, for example using digital equipment to reduce the need for formal care interventions, and increase independence and well-being.

"Moving mental health staff back from the local NHS trust into the local authority was seen as a really positive move. Staff said it had enabled them to be more responsive and provide more holistic and person-centred mental health care and support for Suffolk's residents.

“However, there were also some areas where we’ve told them to make improvements, like improving access to their contact centre which was causing delays in assessments.”

“Suffolk County Council should be really pleased with this assessment, and it means they have a great foundation on which to build more improvements. We look forward to returning to see how they’ve done this.”

Almost £1 million extra committed to investigating significant flooding following Babet

Suffolk County Council has committed almost £1 million of funds to bring in additional flood investigation specialists as the response to Storm Babet continues.

Since the storm, targeted recovery work has been carried out across the county to ensure damaged highway infrastructure is repaired, those whose properties were flooded get help and that investigations can start which will identify how to reduce flood risk.

As lead local flood authority, the county council has a duty to investigate significant flooding under Section 19 of the Flood and Water Management Act. These investigations help to establish the source of flooding, factors which may have caused or exacerbated the flooding, the impacts on people, services and infrastructure and any actions which could be taken to increase resilience to future storm events.

In any usual year, Suffolk County Council carries out around three or four of these investigations. Following Babet, up to 100 look set to be needed.

Councillor Matthew Hicks, Suffolk County Council’s leader, said:

“The impact of this truly unprecedented event is still being felt across the county and will continue to do so for months to come, so it is important that we recognise that and increase our resources appropriately.

“These investigations help us to work with communities to establish the cause of flooding in the worst hit areas and identify ways to manage the risk better in future.”

Councillor Steve Wiles, Suffolk County Council’s Deputy Cabinet Member for Highways Drainage and Flood Recovery, said:

“Our teams continue to work incredibly hard to help our flood-hit communities get back to their feet following the recent storms.

“This increase in resource will mean we can do even more with our communities and, importantly, quicker.”

The Government has now confirmed the arrangements for the DEFRA-funded scheme which means flooded property owners can apply for up to £5,000 to help make their homes and

businesses more resilient to future flooding. Suffolk County Council will therefore start to promote, administer and audit the scheme.

Council's Centre of Excellence to go nationwide

The council has successfully bid for £99,000 from the Government's Innovation and Capacity Fund, which will be spent on more events and materials to upskill and share good practice with councils around England, with Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs).

Suffolk's Centre of Excellence was established in August 2022 and has already engaged with 16 local authorities across the East of England, with 429 representatives attending webinars and a conference, held at The Apex in Bury St Edmunds. The new funding will now extend these offers across the country.

The council was recognised by the Government last year for its knowledge and expertise when engaging with NSIPs such as Sizewell C, Lowestoft's Gull Wing, National Grid upgrades and offshore wind farms.

Councillor Richard Rout, Suffolk County Council's deputy leader and cabinet member for finance and environment, said:

"The volume of NSIPs that Suffolk County Council is involved with continues at pace. Many of these concern huge projects for the country's energy security, such as offshore wind and the infrastructure that is needed to bring all that power onshore for millions of homes and businesses.

"We have a very experienced team, which works on some of the largest projects in the UK. As a county council, our responsibility is to appropriately challenge these schemes to minimise their impacts on communities and maximise local opportunities, such as funding, training, amenities and jobs.

"This recognition from Government for our outstanding contributions to NSIPs will allow us to continue sharing good practice and extend our offer to colleagues around the country, from parish councils to unitary authorities."

The county council has long recognised that town and parish councils, who have limited resources, can easily be overwhelmed by the magnitude of NSIPs - the new funding will enable bespoke guidance to be published in partnership with Suffolk Association of Local Councils.

The funding will also allow previous work to continue, such as updating and creating more accessible guides for local authorities, and progress guidance materials for developers.

December

More public money for adult and children's care, but difficult decisions are needed to balance the books

In the next two years, Suffolk County Council needs to pump almost £74 million extra into protecting the county's most vulnerable residents.

- £74 million extra needed to protect the most vulnerable over two years
- £64.7 million savings to be made over two years
- Council set to reduce workforce, services and use savings

As part of financial plans to prioritise those in greatest need, an additional £42.7 million for children's services and £29.9 million for adult care are being proposed.

Along with local authorities up and down the country, the council has been hit hard by inflation and rising demand for services such as children's care, special educational needs and disabilities and home to school transport. It means having to make difficult decisions about the services it provides, including £64.7 million of savings in 2024/25 and 2025/26.

The two-year savings proposals, which have been [published on the council's website](#) today, include:

- £11 million of staffing costs through changing the way services are delivered and restructuring across the council.
- £30.6 million of additional savings from an extension of the council's hugely successful Adult Social Care Transformation programme, which has focused on reducing demand for more expensive social care options by boosting people's independence and ability to stay well for longer through innovative methods including cutting edge care technology. This transformation programme has already saved £30.7 million over the last six years
- £0.5 million of savings by stopping core funding to Art and Museum sector organisations. To assist with the transition, £528,000 of COVID recovery money will be made available to Arts and Museum sector organisations for 2024/25 which will fully cover the funding reduction for one year.
- £140,000 of savings by centralising Suffolk Archives to The Hold and closing the branches in West and East Suffolk. In February 2023, the council committed £3.4m to relocate the West Suffolk Archives branch to the proposed Western Way development. Remaining at its current location would have required over £5 million to protect the historic records and meet modern archive standards. West Suffolk Council has since decided not to progress with the Western Way development, ending that opportunity. Centralising the three branches into one brings Suffolk in line with the majority of archive services across the country and is better value for taxpayers' money.

- £15.9 million of reserves will be used to balance the 2024/25 budget.

Councillor Richard Rout, Suffolk County Council’s Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Environment, said:

“This is the most challenging budget-setting process the council has faced for many years. But once again, we are putting adult and children’s care at the heart of our plans.

“However, in order to ensure appropriate levels of funding for these key services, and those most in need in Suffolk, we must make difficult decisions about all the other services we deliver, and how we deliver them.

“This is necessary because the demand on council services for those most in need in Suffolk is at an all-time high. The cost of providing many of those services is significant, but the funding that we need is not keeping up. Across the country, councils are having to make similar tough choices.

“Our proposed budget next year will be around £752 million, of which £105m alone is down to these cost pressures from inflation and increased demand.

“We are a well-run council and over the last five years, we have saved £66 million by working smarter and leaner. But we now need to go even further.

“We have spent months scrutinising all the council’s spending. There is competition for every pound across all our services, and I understand that each service means something to someone.”

Following the recent funding announcement from the Government, Suffolk County Council will not receive enough funding to keep pace with inflation or the level of demand for services. The council has joined national calls for additional funding and lobbied the Chancellor of the Exchequer directly.

[Full details of Suffolk County Council’s financial plans for 2024/25](#) will be presented to its Scrutiny Committee meeting on 11 January.

The proposals would give the council a budget of around £752 million for 2024/25, made up of funding coming from Government, business rates, charges for services and council tax. The proposed budget would require a 4.99% increase in council tax in next year. This would be made up of a 2.99% increase in general council tax and a 2% increase dedicated to funding adult care.

This means the costs for a household would be:

- Band B property: £23.50 per week (£1.12 per week increase from 2023/24)
(Band B properties are the most common in Suffolk)
- Band D property: £30.21 per week (£1.43 per week increase from 2023/24)

Cllr Rout continues:

"We understand the financial pressure facing the Government with public services everywhere asking for more money. This is money that simply isn't available at the moment, especially after the vital financial support made available during and following the pandemic. This means it is up to local authorities like us to find savings to balance the books.

"I would like to thank the record number of people who completed our online budget consultation, and those who took part in our focus groups.

"Although the majority of people said that they would rather not see council tax being increased next year, I hope they can understand why - for the first time in years - we must ask for the maximum amount possible to help support those most in need.

"Our commitment to make the best possible use of every pound of public money made available to us is absolute."

The budget proposals will be discussed at the council's Scrutiny Committee and then presented at the Cabinet meeting on 30 January. At the Full Council meeting on 15 February, the proposals will be debated, with a vote taking place on the budget for 2024/25 – the first year of the two-year budget proposals.

The Scrutiny Committee meeting will be available to stream on [Suffolk County Council's YouTube channel](#), and public questions can be submitted in advance, details available at www.suffolk.gov.uk

January

Council to ensure Sizewell C delivers for Suffolk as construction begins

Sizewell C today (15th January 2024) triggered its Development Consent Order, meaning that work can begin to build the new 3.2GW nuclear power station on the Suffolk coast.

Suffolk County Council played a key role to get significant improvements made to the plans during the project's examination by the Planning Inspectorate.

As a result, Suffolk will now see around £250 million made available to its communities, by way of mitigating the impact on residents, businesses, the environment, and infrastructure.

The council was also influential in ensuring that a far greater quantity of construction materials will be delivered by rail and sea, reducing the number of lorries on the county's rural roads.

Councillor Richard Rout, Deputy Leader of Suffolk County Council's Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Environment, said:

"Despite a number of concerns during the planning process, this council has worked hard to ensure that should Sizewell C go ahead, Suffolk will be suitably compensated.

"Now that the project is officially underway, we will hold Sizewell C to account and make sure it meets its commitments to support local communities, mitigates its impact on them, and listens to ongoing concerns and issues from residents and businesses.

"We are looking forward to making the most of the economic opportunities for Suffolk which will come from this project, in particular our role coordinating skills and education to create opportunities locally.

"We have always put on record our support for guaranteeing the nation's energy security, and a future of low carbon energy."

During the construction of Sizewell C, Suffolk County Council will have a number of responsibilities, including:

- Discharge requirements (equivalent to planning conditions) to maintain control over highways, archaeology and flooding
- An important role in project governance over the construction period, in particular chairing the Transport Review Group
- Administering a significant proportion of funding negotiated during the examination and secured through the Deed of Obligation

The Deed of Obligation is a legal agreement between Sizewell C, Suffolk County Council and East Suffolk Council for the scheme to limit its impact on local communities during construction.

More information about [Suffolk County Council's role in Sizewell C](#) can be found on its website.

Visitor attractions invited to join 'Good Journey' scheme

Suffolk Growth Partnership and Suffolk County Council have teamed up with the national organisation 'Good Journey' – the UK experts in car-free leisure – in a push to cut carbon emissions and widen access to our leisure, culture and nature for more people.

The initiative, launching in March 2024, supports Suffolk's Greenest County journey towards a carbon net zero visitor economy and will welcome car-free visitors to an array of attractions across Suffolk.

Around 25 local tourism and visitor attractions are now invited to join the Suffolk Good Journey scheme offering residents and visitors discounts and incentives to leave the car at home and explore more of the county on foot, by bike or using public transport. Suffolk visitor attractions participating will be supported and feature on goodjourney.org.uk – providing easy travel information and discounts to domestic and international visitors.

Visitor attractions participating in the Suffolk Good Journey scheme will also form part of a marketing campaign showcasing sustainable tourism visits to Suffolk, offering adventures by train, bus, bike and foot to suit all ages and tastes – from exploring the towns, coast and countryside, and local food and drink delicacies to discovering the cultural and heritage attractions and film locations.

Visitor attractions and venues interested in joining Suffolk Good Journey county can find out more details by contacting Loretta Jones at Good Journey on loretta@goodjourney.org.uk or info@suffolkgrowth.co.uk

Cllr Alexander Nicoll, Deputy Cabinet Member for Transport Strategy at Suffolk County Council, said:

“Being without a car should not preclude access to Suffolk's nature, culture and heritage, which is why Suffolk County Council is pleased to be working with our partners to develop sustainable, car-free tourism in our county. The benefits of this scheme are obvious. By creating easier access to local attractions by foot, bicycle and public transport, we are strengthening our local visitor economy, supporting residents to live independent and healthy lives, and helping Suffolk on its journey to creating the Greenest County.”

Council to propose new funding for arts & heritage in Suffolk

Suffolk County Council is today (26th January) announcing its intention to create a new funding pot open to all arts and heritage organisations in the county.

- Core funding for nine arts and heritage organisations still to cease after 2024/25
- New £500,000 funding pot proposed from 2025/26, open to all arts and heritage organisations in Suffolk
- Proposal to be tabled at Cabinet meeting on 30 January

Following this week's announcement from government that £600 million of further funding will be available to local councils, the council intends to propose a new £500,000 project fund to which all Suffolk's arts and heritage organisations can apply.

However, this does not alter the difficult financial decisions the council is having to make so that it can prioritise spending on services like SEND, home to school transport and children in care. An extra £74 million is still needed over the next two years to protect the county's most vulnerable adults and children.

Proposals to end the core funding of £528,000 of nine arts and heritage organisations after the 2024/25 financial year, are still in place. This funding will be replaced with the new £500,000 project funding pot, open to all arts and heritage organisations, from April 2025.

Councillor Richard Rout, Suffolk County Council's Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Environment, said:

"The announcement from government just a couple of days ago is absolutely welcome, and is a credit to our MPs, our own council, and councils across the country for the lobbying which has paid off. We estimate that Suffolk will see around £7.2 million as a result of this extra investment.

"This successful lobbying enables us to make today's welcome proposal of new project funding for Suffolk's arts and heritage organisations.

"However, given the wider pressures we face caring for the most vulnerable individuals in Suffolk, we must still take a considerable amount of money from our reserves to balance our budget. That simply cannot continue.

"On top of this, there are still millions of pounds that we need to save in the coming years. Like all county councils with responsibilities for key services that look after those most in need, we are not out of the financial woods, significant challenges and difficult decisions still remain."

Cllr Bobby Bennett, Suffolk County Council's Cabinet Member for Equality and Communities, said:

"We have been adamant since starting our budget proposals that we would seek opportunities to support the arts and heritage sector. The recent government announcement has presented us with such an opportunity. As I am, people across Suffolk are rightly proud of our cultural

organisations and I'm pleased we have been able to make this proposal to continue to fund the sector.

"There are many diverse and exciting arts and heritage groups in the county, delivering amazing work in their local communities who would all have an equal opportunity to bid to help fund their projects. Together, we would enable more early interventions for Suffolk people who might need some support.

"Should this proposal get the green light, we will continue to work with organisations across the sector to help us shape how the fund is set up."

The new £500,000 fund would contribute to delivering on the council's ambitions such as looking after the health and wellbeing of Suffolk's residents, particularly those most in need of extra support to live as safely, independently, and healthily as possible.

The impact of the government announcement for further funding for councils will be discussed at Suffolk County Council's Cabinet Meeting on 30 January 2024, where proposals will be explored.

February

Public consultation on Suffolk County Council's proposed devolution deal starts on 18th March

A 10-week public consultation on our proposed devolution deal with the Government will start on 18th March and run through until 26th May. The consultation will be in two main parts – an open survey, hosted by Suffolk County Council, that any residents can complete and a sample survey of 1000 Suffolk residents conducted independently by Ipsos Mori. The consultation will be available through our website www.suffolk.gov.uk/devolution and social media. There will also be media coverage highlighting the consultation.

New cabinet structure will strengthen SEND reform

A column by Matthew Hicks, Leader of Suffolk County Council.

In recent weeks, readers will no doubt have seen a lot of news stories about SEND services in Suffolk, following the latest inspection report published by Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC). This week I have taken decisive action to strengthen my cabinet in a reshuffle – including creating a much greater focus on improving SEND.

Experienced cabinet member Cllr Andrew Reid will take the role of cabinet member for SEND and education. The role previously included oversight of skills, but to enable more political focus and accountability on urgent improvements on SEND services, this has now been moved to Cllr Richard Smith to sit alongside his existing responsibilities for economic development, transport strategy and waste. Cllr Debbie Richards will support Cllr Reid as deputy cabinet member for SEND. Working with the DfE, we are also establishing a new SEND Improvement Board, with an independent chair. This is a requirement following the Ofsted/CQC inspection.

Continuing the changes to children and young people (CYP) leadership, serving cabinet member Cllr Bobby Bennett has been appointed as cabinet member for CYP services. Two deputy cabinet members have been promoted to cabinet roles – Cllr Philip Faircloth-Mutton is now cabinet member for equality and communities and Cllr Craig Rivett is cabinet member for public health and public protection.

Alongside these changes, further new faces come in as deputy cabinet members. Cllr Nadia Cenci becomes deputy cabinet member for property and county farms, Cllr David Roach becomes deputy cabinet member for fostering and adoption and Cllr Heike Sowa joins as deputy cabinet member for transformation.

I am confident in the determination and tenacity of both Andrew and Debbie to help council officers drive those improvements forward. As a cabinet, we have a collective mission - we must see real and lasting improvement in SEND services and deliver on the wider ambitions of this council. The people of Suffolk deserve nothing less.

Separately, there has also been change at a senior officer level within SEND services, with two senior leaders having left the organisation late last year and interim leadership in place. A new executive director of children and young people is in the process of being recruited. The application window closed last week. This will be a key executive role and we are specifically looking for someone who understands SEND, knows what success looks like and who can deliver the much-needed cultural change that is needed and that Suffolk children and their families deserve.

I am sorry and deeply disappointed that the speed of change has been too slow and am determined to deliver improvements through leadership change, investments and culture change. Most importantly, I want the experience of children and families to be far better, emotionally sensitive and timely.

Getting this right for the children and young people in Suffolk is my top priority – a commitment shared by councillors and senior leadership team. This is not an empty pledge. We remain steadfast and resolved to go further and faster with our reforms.

Driving forward SEND reform will be paramount. Our job will be to build on the good work that is already underway, including investing more than £55 million to create more than 1,250 additional places in specialist and mainstream schools and the creation of specialist SEND support teams and training for all Suffolk schools to support them to meet the additional needs of children in mainstream schools. If approved by councillors next week, we are also proposing the additional investment of £4.4m in 2024/25 and £3.4m in 2025/26 to expand our statutory SEND teams and secure sufficient educational psychology resource to improve the quality and timeliness of Education Health and Care assessments and reviews. This investment comes at a time when Suffolk County Council is facing its most challenging budget.

Despite this challenge, it is right that we continue to invest in those who need it most and improve our service for the children, young people, and families in Suffolk.

Dragon Patcher lands in Suffolk to bolster response to rural potholes

Suffolk Highways has welcomed the new pothole-repairing machine to help fix the growing number of potholes experienced nationally during the winter season, with a trial set to initially target defects in rural Suffolk.

The Dragon Patcher is a machine that releases compressed air which cleans the surface of the road, before heating the surface to a temperature that enables repair material to bond effectively with the road surface, allowing the pothole to be repaired with an aggregate and hot bitumen material.

Compared with the traditional approach of repairing potholes, the Dragon Patcher can work five times faster. This trial is in addition to the potholes being repaired around the clock as part of our routine repair programme, during the past two months Suffolk Highways has repaired 2,851 potholes across Suffolk.

Fuelled by the biodiesel, HVO (hydrotreated vegetable oil), the patcher reduces raw material use and creates zero waste and has shown to provide significant carbon savings when compared to traditional patching techniques.

Councillor Paul West, Suffolk County Council's Cabinet Member for Ipswich, Operational Highways, and Flooding, said:

"The recent cold and wet weather has expectedly brought a huge spike in the number of potholes appearing across our roads and we are working around the clock to tackle the current levels we are seeing.

"The arrival of the Dragon Patcher in Suffolk will help bolster our efforts in getting these defects repaired, especially focusing on rural roads where we can repair higher numbers, in a fraction of the time.

"This new piece of kit is one way in which our new highways contract strives to provide better value for Suffolk's taxpayers and works to reduce impact on the environment."

Once the trial ends in Suffolk, a decision will be taken on whether to roll out the technology across the county.

Have your say on Suffolk's local transport plan

Residents are invited to share their views on how they travel to help inform Suffolk's Local Transport Plan.

The plan sets out a long-term vision for transport in Suffolk and covers key themes such as decarbonisation of transport, strengthening the local economy, promoting health, wellbeing and social inclusion, and creating better-connected places that encourage a range of transport choices.

Suffolk County Council is asking for feedback on the key themes proposed for the fourth version of the plan, which will cover the period until 2040 and respond to long-term transport opportunities and challenges facing Suffolk and the UK as a whole.

A link to the survey can be found at <https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/ltp4>. The consultation will run for eight weeks until 8 April 2024.

Feedback from the consultation will be collated and inform the production of the draft local transport plan. The full draft document will then be subject to further consultation later in the year.

Cllr Richard Smith MVO, Suffolk County Council Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Skills, Transport Strategy and Waste, said:

“A lot has changed since we wrote our last Local Transport Plan. Many people’s travel habits have changed permanently since the pandemic and so it is important that we hear from residents to take this into account.

“This consultation has been designed to seek your feedback at an early stage and to help us to develop a transport plan that reflects the needs and aspirations of as much of the local community as possible.”

Council budget approved with a focus on protecting the most vulnerable

Suffolk County Council has confirmed its financial budget for 2024-25.

The £752.8m package was approved at the Full Council meeting on Thursday 15 February 2024, with the priority to protect vulnerable adults and children across the county.

Despite the recently announced uplift in government funding and asking residents for the maximum Council Tax contribution, it is still not sufficient to cover the rising costs imposed by inflation, or the increasing levels of demand for services - in particular children’s care, special educational needs, and disabilities (SEND) and home to school transport.

Councillor Richard Rout, Suffolk County Council’s Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Environment, said:

“Focusing on those children who have extremely demanding needs and no-one else to turn to, is the right thing to do. The same is true of adults who we want to help lead independent lives, or to have the best quality of life possible.”

However, as a direct result of the government’s recent intervention to provide further funding, the following proposals were approved:

- £500,000 of project funding will be made available to all arts and heritage organisations in Suffolk from April 2025 – it is intended that this funding will be available every year going forward
- £528,000 of core funding to nine arts and heritage organisations in Suffolk will end in March 2025
- £45,000 will be reinstated to support the County Music Service from April 2024
- £9 million of reserves will be used to balance the 2024-25 budget

To provide care and services for vulnerable children and adults, the next two years will see an additional £42.7 million allocated to children’s services, and an additional £29.9 million for adult services. However this means £64.7 million of savings needs to be found at the same time.

These significant savings over the next two years include:

- £11 million of staffing costs through changing the way services are delivered and restructuring across the council
- £30.6 million of additional savings from an extension of the council's hugely successful Adult Social Care Transformation programme

Councillor Richard Rout, Suffolk County Council's Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Environment, said:

"Balancing this budget has been incredibly tough. But by prioritising our spending on those in greatest need, they will hopefully not find life incredibly tough.

"Focusing on those children who have extremely demanding needs and no-one else to turn to, is the right thing to do. The same is true of adults who we want to help lead independent lives, or to have the best quality of life possible.

"These are very expensive services to provide. It does not leave us with as much money as we would like to invest in every other service that we are required to deliver. We have just 23p in every £1 to maintain highways and footpaths, fund libraries, run a fire and rescue service, tackle climate change, and so much more.

"Approving the budget today is not the end of this piece of work. In many ways it is just the beginning, as we must deliver on the millions of pounds of savings we've identified over the next two years."

The council's budget will increase by 8.6% (from £693.0 million to £752.8 million), some of which is generated by a 4.99% increase in the council's share of Council Tax, and additional Government funding.

The increase of 4.99% to Council Tax is made up of a 2.99% increase in general Council Tax and a 2.00% increase dedicated to funding adult care. This will see the council's share of a Band B property's bill rise by £1.12 per week, compared to last year.

More of Suffolk's tree cover and orchards to be restored

Suffolk County Council has secured funding of £201,213 from the government's Local Authority Treescapes Fund on behalf of Babergh District Council, East Suffolk Council, Mid Suffolk District Council, Ipswich Borough Council and West Suffolk Council.

The funding will go towards the planting of the trees, many of which are 'standards' around six feet in height when planted. The funding also covers three years of maintenance to help the trees become established.

The Fund aims to restore tree cover in non-woodland areas which may have been impacted by issues such as disease, habitat degradation or ageing tree stock. Many of the proposed projects will involve their local community and pupils from local schools.

Councillor Richard Rout, Suffolk County Council’s Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Environment, said:

“We have now made three successful bids to the Local Authority Treescapes Fund on behalf of local councils, bringing in around half a million pounds to plant and maintain 7,604 trees in recent years.

“We are re-introducing tree cover where it has been lost. Successful tree-planting doesn’t have to cover many acres of land – small residential plantings can have an equally significant impact on local residents and wildlife.

“Access to a green space helps improve our health and wellbeing, and can be havens for insects and support wildlife. It’s crucial that we continue to protect and enhance our local environment, and help reverse the decline in Suffolk’s biodiversity.”

Creating more orchards is one of the themes across the planting projects. Nationally, there has been a decline in the number of orchards because of commercial pressures and increased imports.

This loss of orchards has impacts on the species they support, with less blossom and fruit for food, and less shelter and shading. It also means we are losing some of our heritage varieties and reducing genetic diversity.

One example of this is the creation of a community orchard in Woods Meadow Country Park, near Lowestoft. Local varieties of apple, plum, gage and cherry trees will be sourced from the Suffolk & Apples & Orchards Project. The trees will be cared for by wardens, the Woods Meadow volunteer group, the local primary school, and local residents. The fruit will be available for the local visitors to the park to pick and eat, but also a good source of food for birds and wildlife.

Council to review weed control for roads and pavements

In February 2022, the council agreed to stop using glyphosate in its routine weed treatment programmes, to find more natural alternatives to help protect the local environment.

However, the alternative products proved unable to meet requirements, which was further exacerbated by exceptional growing conditions. Multiple applications were sometimes needed which could introduce other negative environmental impacts.

It has proved a challenge to reduce high-performing treatments, whilst significantly mitigating the environmental impact. Other local authorities locally have experienced a similar situation.

Councillor Paul West, Suffolk County Council’s Cabinet Member for Ipswich, Operational Highways and Flooding, said:

“It is important that we trial different methods to maintain weeds on our highway network, and strike a balance between spending taxpayers’ money carefully, protecting the environment and considering public safety on our roads and pavements.

“Part of that balance is making sure that whatever treatment we apply, it is effective – and that includes looking to reintroduce glyphosate to some of our operations for the best possible performance.

“We’ve monitored the work that we’ve done since moving away from glyphosate on our roads and pavements and listened to feedback from residents. Some were pleased that we were using less chemicals, but others thought that weeds had thrived too much. We agree that the different treatments haven’t worked as well as we’d hoped.”

Regular weed treatment on our highway network will continue using a variety of methods, with plans for glyphosate being considered only when appropriate – the ambition still remains to reduce the use of glyphosate as far as possible.

Teams will continue to monitor and research the different approaches being used to remove weeds on our roads and pavements. Where needed, glyphosate would be used responsibly as it is one of the most cost-effective and long-lasting solutions.

£4.4 million to be spent on additional staff to strengthen SEND reform

Suffolk County Council’s Cabinet confirmed that 60 new members of staff will be recruited to drive forward important reform to the way special educational needs and disability (SEND) services are delivered in Suffolk.

New Cabinet Member for Education and SEND, Andrew Reid, today reaffirmed Suffolk County Council’s commitment to ensuring improvements to the SEND service go further and faster. This includes an increase in permanent SEND staff of nearly 15%.

These new posts will support the improvement of the quality and timeliness of assessments, plans, reviews, and communications with families.

Councillor Andrew Reid, Cabinet Member for Education and SEND, said:

“We must continue to invest in this service to bring about wide scale improvement. This includes investing in staff resources, so we have the capacity to deliver change. We continue to focus on this priority – we owe it to Suffolk’s children and young people.”

In January, a report by Ofsted and Care Quality Commission (CQC) found significant concerns with the way SEND services are delivered by the NHS and Suffolk County Council. In response to this, the Local Area Partnership, made up of Suffolk County Council, the NHS Suffolk and Northeast Essex Integrated Care Board (ICB) and NHS Norfolk and Waveney ICB, must submit a Priority Action Plan by March 7 outlining the improvement programme.

In order to support this improvement programme, an additional £4.4 million was signed off

during the budget discussions at Full Council on February 15. Of this, £3.4million will provide 46 new full-time posts – a increase of 14.76% in current staffing levels. An additional £1million will be spent in 2024/25 to fund 14 temporary posts.

Cabinet today agreed to delegate authority to approve the priority action plan to be submitted to Ofsted and CQC on March 7 to the statutory director of children's services in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Education and SEND. The priority action plan is also being approved at the Suffolk and North-East Essex ICB Executive and the Norfolk and Waveney ICB Executive on 4 March 2024.

March

New Suffolk campaign urges drivers to switch their engines off

A new campaign urging Suffolk's drivers to switch off their engines when parked has launched today (1 March 2024). The campaign against Idling particularly focuses on turning off engines outside schools to protect children's growing lungs from unnecessary pollution.

Pupils and staff at Castle Hill Infant and Junior School support Suffolk Idling Action campaign. Idling engines, where a car is stationary with its engine on, cause peaks in harmful pollutants which when breathed in overtime can lead to asthma, heart disease, cancer and stunt children's growing lungs.

Children are particularly vulnerable to the effects of pollution because their height puts them closer to exhaust fumes, they breathe more rapidly than adults and so absorb more pollutants and because their developing organs are more easily damaged.

Children living in highly polluted areas are four times more likely to have reduced lung function in adulthood, improving air quality for children has been shown to halt and reverse this effect.

A study published in January 2024, found that hospital admissions among children were "significantly associated" with exposure to higher levels of air pollution over a two-week period and that only around half of them would have needed hospital care if pollution had been within legal limits.

Research shows that idling engines produce up to twice the amount of exhaust emissions compared to when a vehicle is moving. In a survey carried out in Suffolk at the end of 2022, 35% of respondents said they never switch their engine off when parked or stationary.

Councillor Paul West, Cabinet Member for Ipswich, Operational Highways and Flooding, said:

The evidence is there, pollution is damaging our health and damaging the environment. Switching our engines off when parked is a simple action we can all take and it's been proven to make a huge difference to air quality, particularly outside schools. This campaign is just one of the actions Suffolk County Council and its partners are taking, through our joint Air Quality Strategy work, to improve air quality in the county for residents and visitors alike.

Suffolk County Council has joined forces with schools across the County along with Babergh and Mid Suffolk, East Suffolk, Ipswich and West Suffolk Councils to deliver the campaign.

For more information visit www.healthysuffolk.org.uk/airquality. To request materials, email: ph.widerdeterminants@suffolk.gov.uk.

Final bascule span arrives for Gull Wing bridge

The final section of the Gull Wing Bridge in Lowestoft has arrived bringing the completion of this significant infrastructure project one step closer.

Subject to favourable weather conditions, Lake Lothing will now be closed to marine traffic for three weeks from Friday 8 March while the main bascule span is installed.

The bascule span is 39.5m long, 22m wide and 35m tall and will weigh approx. 1120 tonnes when delivered to site and positioned. This is made up of 750 tonnes of permanent structural steelwork and an additional 370 tonnes of temporary ballast to ensure the bridge stability during installation.

An additional counterweight of heavyweight concrete will be placed within the J-beams during the installation and commissioning phase of approx. 380 tonnes resulting in the total weight of the bridge during operation being approx. 1100 tonnes.

The bridge, when installed, will sit clear of the highest tide by 12m, meaning that the tips of the J-beams will usually be well over 50m above the sea below. When the bridge is rolled back in the open position, the end of the bridge span that carries the road will be over 60m above the tide below.

The completed bascule bridge will be the largest rolling bascule bridge in the world lifted using hydraulic cylinders.

CLlr Matthew Hicks, Leader of Suffolk County Council, said:

“The arrival of the bascule span into Lowestoft signals that we are in the home stretch of this significant project. The long-awaited Gull Wing bridge will make travel between north and south Lowestoft easier, reduce traffic congestion, and be a catalyst for regeneration. It is a promise delivered for the people of Lowestoft and Suffolk.”

Simon Bretherton, Project Director at Suffolk County Council, said:

“As well as the most challenging, this is the most impressive of all the Gull Wing deliveries and the huge J beams will transform Lowestoft’s skyline. Over the coming days, we will begin positioning the bascule span ready for its installation. There are still challenges and risks to overcome, but, once installed, we will enter into the final commissioning phase and begin making preparations for opening the bridge to the public.”

Suffolk County Council considers LionLink proposals unacceptable and unfair

Suffolk County Council believes that the failure of two National Grid offshore projects to coordinate with each other, will cause irreversible damage to important landscapes in the county.

The council considers that the proposed LionLink and Sea Link projects could share infrastructure where cabling is already proposed to come onshore at Aldeburgh, by the Sea Link project which is at a more advanced planning stage.

LionLink is an interconnector being proposed by National Grid Ventures. Sea Link is an electrical cabling and infrastructure project being proposed by National Grid Electricity Transmission – a different member of the National Grid family.

However, the LionLink project has today (6 March 2024) published details to say that it has no intention to coordinate with Sea Link at Aldeburgh, instead it is proposing a separate landing point at either Southwold or Walberswick.

Councillor Richard Rout, Suffolk County Council's Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Environment and Finance said:

"The high handed and process driven approach by National Grid Ventures is totally unacceptable. They are showing a complete lack of respect to Suffolk and its coastal communities.

"The absence of coordination between the Sea Link and LionLink projects will, if they are consented, result in over 10 miles of some of the most sensitive and important landscapes in the UK being dug up to create more trenches for more cabling.

"This additional and unnecessary destruction of the Suffolk countryside and natural environment could be wholly avoided, if there was project coordination – something we have been calling for, for years.

"If LionLink has to make landfall in Suffolk, it must do all it can to minimise harm to our local communities and landscapes.

"The public, the Planning Inspectorate, and ultimately the Secretary of State at the Department of Energy and Net Zero, must have the opportunity to fully consider coordination with the Sea Link project as an alternative to Southwold or Walberswick. This would make for a much fairer process for all, and a better understanding for everyone concerned."

The council's submission to the last non-statutory consultation for LionLink [can be read here](#). National Grid Ventures expected to submit a Development Consent Order application in 2025.

Funding boost for new and existing bus services across Suffolk

Suffolk County Council is to spend £3.6 million of Government funding over the next two years on strengthening and expanding Suffolk's bus network.

The council has been awarded £1.8 million per year for two years – a total of £3.6 million – from the Department for Transport's Bus Service Improvement Fund Phase 2 (BSIP 2, renamed from BSIP+) to deliver improvements to public transport in Suffolk.

Suffolk's Enhanced Partnership, which represents the county council and local bus operators, has agreed to allocate the first year's funding in three ways.

First, following an open call for suggestions, £1.2 million will be allocated to support operator- and local community-led proposals for new or enhanced services across the county.

Submissions were reviewed against criteria including value for money, the number of passengers that could benefit, how they integrate with existing services, and their likely long-term financial sustainability after the BSIP 2 funding ends.

Schemes awarded funding include:

- Enhancements of the 84 and 753 services connecting Sudbury to Colchester and Bury St Edmunds
- Enhancements of the 521 service connecting Halesworth, Saxmundham and Aldeburgh
- A re-route of the 14/15 service from Haverhill to Bury St Edmunds to serve West Suffolk Hospital and to increase frequency
- Enhancements to the Buzzabout community transport service serving villages north of Lowestoft
- New services connecting villages between Stowmarket and Mendlesham and surrounding villages
- Development of a new demand-responsive transport service to connect Brett Valley villages with commercial services in Hadleigh and Lavenham
- New services from Bramford to Ipswich and Stowupland to Stowmarket
- Enhancements to the operation of the Beyton/Thurston/Elmswell/Woolpit taxibus

A full list of the successful schemes can be found [here](#).

All schemes are expected to commence operations between April 2024 and September 2024.

Cllr Richard Smith MVO, Suffolk County Council Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Skills, Transport Strategy and Waste, said:

“Our focus for allocating Suffolk's BSIP 2 fund was to look at how we could increase long-term patronage and revenues to stabilise the existing bus network, whilst also considering new ideas

for services. I am pleased that the successful new schemes will support residents not only in our urban centres but in communities spread across the county.

“We have chosen schemes that test different approaches to delivering public transport in our predominantly rural county, following parish council suggestions for new connections to help communities access services.

“These are schemes that have been deemed likely to be sustainable once the initial funding has ended, but, as with all public transport, these services will require passengers. I would encourage residents to make the best possible use of them to ensure they continue into the future.”

A further £450,000 has been allocated to commercial bus operators in order to support and stabilise the existing bus network and maintain essential social and economic transport links for local communities.

The final £150,000 will be used to develop bus priority schemes, creating opportunities for smoother and more convenient bus journeys and making bus travel a more attractive transport option.

It is proposed that funding for the successful schemes will continue into the second year using a similar proportion of that year’s allocation.

A decision on how to spend any remaining funding will be informed by further reviews of the existing commercial bus network in collaboration with the operators and continued feedback from partners and communities.

Suffolk to benefit from huge £7.3 million EV investment

Suffolk County Council has secured millions of pounds of funding to help develop electric vehicle (EV) charging across the county.

The county council has been allocated the money after successful bids to the Government’s Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (LEVI) fund, which supports local authorities to plan and deliver charging infrastructure for residents without off-street parking.

Suffolk residents without off-street parking will benefit from £5.9 million to support EV charging, and a further £1.4 million will be used to develop the county’s existing EV charging network in community locations.

Homes without a driveway face challenges when it comes to charging an EV - in some cases it is just not possible, and it is unsafe and hazardous to run cables across pavements. Along with inconvenient access to public charging, these are common reasons that people give for not choosing an EV.

However, the funding will start to provide solutions to some of these issues, with opportunities to develop:

- kerbside charging points
- community charging hubs
- car park charging points
- fast and rapid charging point infrastructure improvements

Suffolk residents are invited to ‘nominate’ their street for consideration for on-street charging points, using [this online form](#). Although not every road may be suitable, suggestions from residents will help indicate where there is demand for charging points.

Councillor Richard Rout, Suffolk County Council’s Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Environment, said:

“The recent [EV:Ready Report](#), which the county council commissioned on behalf of all local authorities in Suffolk, suggests a need for 2,000 standard chargers and 40 to 60 rapid charging stations in Suffolk by 2030, to meet the demand of the EV transition.

“The LEVI funding will enable the council to play its part in moving Suffolk closer to those numbers, building on all our EV achievements so far – for example, the county council has been working on the county’s EV charging infrastructure since 2018 when we launched the Plug In Suffolk project.

“Supporting Suffolk’s residents, businesses and visitors to move to EVs goes beyond just using less petrol and diesel. It’s about improving Suffolk’s air quality and enabling us to live healthier lives, and reducing the impacts of climate change which have once again been brought into sharp focus by the many storms and flooding events we’ve seen in recent months.”

Technology and Decarbonisation Minister Anthony Browne, said:

“This Government has a plan to help speed up the installation of EV chargepoints, which we’re getting on and delivering.

“This dedicated funding to local councils is part of our plan to ensure people can switch from a petrol or diesel car to an EV when they choose to do so.”

This investment continues the council’s contribution to the [Suffolk Climate Emergency Plan](#), which identifies that the decarbonisation of vehicles in Suffolk is a key aspect of meeting the net zero by 2030 target for the county.

Complementing the new funding, is Suffolk County Council’s recently published [Suffolk Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure Strategy](#). It has been written with the input of all borough and district councils, aiming to improve the EV charging experience for drivers in Suffolk.

Cllr Rout continues:

“The Strategy gives us a clear picture of what Suffolk has achieved already, but importantly shows where we must focus our efforts to further support Suffolk’s residents, businesses and visitors.

“We of course promote walking, cycling and using public transport where possible, but for the vehicles that remain on our roads, we want to encourage the transition to EVs. It is an important culture to embrace, as it positively impacts so much from climate change, to our health, to our local tourism economy.

“Both the Strategy and the successful funding bids are an indication of the county council’s continuing commitment to encouraging EV use and our drive to net zero by 2030.”

Even more potholes filled as Roadmender trial hits Suffolk

The Roadmender has arrived in Suffolk, as the county sees a 34% increase in pothole repairs through extra investment, more resource, and new ways of working.

The county council has been working to repair the increasing number of potholes which have been breaking out following very wet and cold weather recently. One way in which the council is increasing its repair rate is by trialling new methods of fixing potholes.

Suffolk Highways welcomed ‘Highway Workforce’ with their Roadmender Elastomac solution - a repair method which results in sealed, longer-lasting pothole repairs; which are quicker to carry out.

The trial which began on 11 March, is eco-friendly and lowers the carbon footprint of repairs by 80% is effectively supporting Suffolk Highways in its fight against the rising number of potholes on the county’s roads.

The ‘Roadmender’ works on both asphalt and concrete roads and is designed for repairs to all types of road defects and is capable of overlaying areas with multiple defects in a single visit. The process is more efficient, reducing material and waste by 90% and avoiding unnecessary disruption on roads.

Councillor Paul West, Suffolk County Council’s cabinet member for Ipswich, operational highways and flooding, said:

“Potholes are a huge issue currently facing local authorities up and down the country, here in Suffolk is no different.

“The extremely wet weather conditions have meant an increase in the number of potholes breaking out, so we are doing all we can to stay on top of the problem.

“Our efforts have included bringing additional resource in and trialling new machinery and methods which are focussed on fixing more defects, quicker and more sustainably.

“By investing more resource and trying new methods, we have been able to fix 34% more potholes than last year.”

April 2024

Over 400 Suffolk roads set for upgrade as largest ever surfacing project gets underway

Residents across Suffolk are set to benefit from 421 newly surfaced roads this year - almost doubling the number of roads completed last year, as Suffolk Highways' largest ever resurfacing programmes get underway.

With the start of the surface dressing programme beginning this week, 102 roads will be surface dressed, whilst a further 319 sites will benefit from a full machine resurfacing during the year.

Surface dressing is an efficient, sustainable and cost-effective maintenance treatment that prolongs the life of a road surface – it restores skid resistance and seals the road surface from water, whilst removing potholes and improving level differences of the road.

The surface dressing project sits alongside the programmes for reactively repairing potholes and machine resurfacing roads, all complementing one another. During the past six months, Suffolk Highways has repaired over 9,000 potholes and resurfaced 41 roads, with a further 278 roads planned for resurfacing in this financial year.

New for this year, Suffolk Highways' supply chain partner, Hazell & Jefferies, has invested in new vehicles which allow the new surface to be laid in a safer and more efficient way. For example, the new vehicles eliminate the risk of hitting overhead cables or structures.

Councillor Paul West, Suffolk County Council's cabinet member for Ipswich, operational highways and flooding, said:

"We are investing an extra £10 million into our surfacing programmes this year and have been busy trialling new ways of repairing potholes quicker, whilst streamlining processes to ensure we can keep on top of a challenging period when it comes to the surge of potholes we see during winter.

"The surface dressing programme is one of a range of methods we use to maintain and future-proof our roads. Preventative treatments such as machine resurfacing and surface dressing help stop potholes from forming in the first place.

"I am glad that extra money going to road maintenance this year is almost double what we have seen in recent years, it remains one of our top priorities as the local highway authority.

“We recognise there is some way to go, however we are committed to doing all we can within the parameters of funding and resource to maintain Suffolk’s roads to the standards we all want to see.”

- For more information on surface dressing and to view this year’s programme, please visit: [Surface dressing](#)
- For more information on machine resurfacing and to view this year’s programme, please visit: [Road Resurfacing](#)

99% of pupils receive a preferred primary school on National Offer Day

99.36% of children were offered a place on National Offer Day at one of their three preferred primary schools and 96.52% were offered a place at their first preference school.

Suffolk County Council received 6,844 applications from parents and carers indicating which primary school they would prefer their child to join in September 2024.

Families who applied online can log in to the online service from today to see the school their child has been offered. They will also receive an email to confirm this offer unless they have indicated that they do not wish to. Letters will be sent to parents who made a paper application by second class post today (16 April 2024)

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

‘It is great news that once again the majority of families have been offered a place at one of their preferred schools, especially with so many being offered a place at their first preference school. We appreciate that not all families may have received a place at their preferred school. If this is the case and a parent or carer’s preference for a Suffolk school has been refused, their child’s name will automatically be added to the waiting list for that school. Parents and carers will also be advised how to lodge an appeal should they wish to do so.’

Once school places have been confirmed, parents need to consider how their child will get to and from school. If their child is eligible for Suffolk County Council funded school travel they will receive an email by 10 May 2024 with details of how to opt-in.

Any parents or carers with a child born between 1 September 2019 and 31 August 2020 who have not yet applied for a school place should make an application immediately. Information on how to make an application can be found on the [School Admission pages](#) or by contacting Suffolk County Council on **0345 600 0981**.

For further information on how to view your offer online and guidance on what to do if you have not received your preferred offer, please read the [School admissions FAQ page](#).

New Independent Chair appointed to drive forward SEND reform

Suffolk County Council announces that Kathryn Boulton has been appointed as the new independent chair of the Local Area Partnership's SEND Improvement Board.

Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) provision is delivered by the Local Area Partnership in Suffolk, which includes Suffolk County Council, NHS Suffolk and North-East Essex Integrated Care Board and NHS Norfolk and Waveney Integrated Care Board.

The SEND Improvement Board was set up in response to the inspection of SEND services in Suffolk in November last year by Ofsted and CQC and is a requirement of the Improvement Notice that will be issued to Suffolk by the Department for Education. Made up of senior leaders from the council and NHS, board members will oversee the implementation and review of plans and services aimed at improving the way SEND services are delivered in Suffolk. It will also ensure the successful delivery of the Priority Action Plan, which was co-produced following the inspection and has been agreed by the Department for Education. [You can read that plan online.](#)

The new chair of the board, Kathryn, has 37 years of experience across children's services. With an education background and success in several senior leadership roles, Kathryn has significant experience of transforming SEND services in local authorities and ensuring the voices and experiences of children and young people with SEND and their families are central to the design and delivery of SEND services.

Kathryn, who will chair her first meeting on June 7th, said:

"I feel privileged to be appointed as independent chair and am committed to working with the Local Area Partnership to ensure the improvements needed are delivered at pace.

"For me, it's important that we listen and learn from children and their families and that they are at the heart of all our thinking, planning and ambitions for the future.

"I don't underestimate the challenge ahead. However, I am confident that by working together effectively, we can bring about positive change that achieves positive outcomes for children and young people with SEND across Suffolk. I am very much looking forward to getting started."

Andrew Reid, Cabinet Member for Education and SEND at Suffolk County Council, said:

"An independent chair is crucial in ensuring we stay on track and improve outcomes for our children and young people with SEND and their families. Kathryn will hold the partnership to account and will act as both a critical friend and a sounding board.

"The Improvement Board has an important job to do and we remain focused on providing the best provision for children and young people with SEND."

In addition to Kathryn's appointment, the Local Area Partnership will receive an Improvement Notice from the Department for Education. This was an expected outcome after the Ofsted and CQC inspection. It means that advisors from the Department for

Education and NHS England will work with the Local Area Partnership to support and monitor improvement plans until further notice.

Cllr Reid added:

“We welcome this. We already have a good relationship with the Department for Education, and the additional expertise and guidance of specialist advisors will further strengthen our improvement work.”

Highway Report and Statistics

Since Storm Babet in October 2023 (which generally coincided with the commencement of the new highways contract with Milestone) there has been a substantial increase in the number of customer reports received by Suffolk Highways.

Annual data from 2022/23 (40,003 customer reports) and 2023/24 (60,043 customer reports to 23 February) shows there has been an **increase of over 20,000 reports so far in 2023/24**.

If this continues at the same rate, it is expected that the volume of customer reports could top 65,000 **representing a 63% increase** on last year.

Between October and February, Suffolk Highway completed in total **10,533 safety defect repairs**, a 45% increase on the last 2 years. **7,328 road defect repairs** have been completed since October.

During the period October to February, the average number of reactive gangs provided is **20.2 per day** (excluding Dragon Patcher).

For the same period during 2022/23, the old contract provided an average of 12.6 reactive gangs per day.