

July 2025

Parish Report

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Funding for Local Government Reorganisation and Devolution

On Tuesday 17 June, Cabinet approved allocating £1.9m from council reserves towards the cost of work the council needs to undertake to set up the new mayoral authority with Norfolk County Council and to prepare its business case for a single unitary council, which needs to be submitted to the government in September. Mayoral elections are due to be held in May 2026, with the mayoral authority set up a few months earlier, in February. The government has provided £1m towards the costs of the mayoral authority, which Suffolk County Council and Norfolk County Council have agreed to split between them. The government has also allocated £290k for Suffolk towards Local Government Reorganisation (LGR), which is to be shared with the other councils who are also preparing their proposals for the government to consider in September. The council is not planning to use all of the £1.9m from reserves, which it is allocating as the financial outturn for 2024-25 was better than expected – it just wants to put aside some money it can use if necessary. The costs of setting up the mayoral authority and reorganising local councils is more likely to be tens of millions; it is the potential long-term savings that makes the process worthwhile to the government, who provide council funding.

Raising Educational Attainment in Suffolk

On Tuesday 24 June, the council's Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Committee considered the educational attainment of children in the county and how to improve it, as Suffolk is currently below national attainment figures at Key Stage 2 (year 6) and at Key Stage 4 (year 11). The council works closely with headteachers and the leaders of multi-academy trusts (MATs) so that schools can learn from each other via the Suffolk Education Partnership, which was established in January 2023. The Department for Education's RISE (Regional Improvement in Standards and Excellence) programme also undertakes targeted work with schools to help them improve grades, and council officers in the education team also provide support to all local authority-maintained schools, with mentoring and advice for governing bodies. Support is also offered to academy schools, although they do not have to engage with it; while the council still has statutory responsibility for school improvement for all of Suffolk, academies receive their funding directly from the government and not from local authorities. The meeting also noted that Suffolk still receives a low level of funding compared to other counties, and council leaders regularly lobby the government for fairer funding.

Suffolk Libraries Changes to Suffolk Community Libraries

From the 1 June, libraries across the county were taken back in-house by Suffolk County Council at the end of the contract with Suffolk Libraries, who had been running the libraries since 2012. This was a controversial decision which attracted a lot of public and press interest, including a petition against it which was signed by over 20,000 people. The new name for the service is Suffolk Community Libraries, with new branding, but the council's political administration has given assurances that all libraries will remain open, with no reduction in opening hours.

Local Businesses Celebrate Carbon Reduction

On 11 June, the council held its annual Carbon Charter event to recognise local businesses for their efforts at carbon reduction. The awards were set up by the council in 2010 and since that time more than 500 businesses of all sizes have been given Carbon Charter awards for taking action on climate, reducing their carbon emissions or developing green spaces. Speakers at the event included CNH Tractors, Groundwork East and Home Farm Nacton, and prizes were given to Suffolk Chamber of Commerce, Shepherd Engineering, Kelling Heath Holiday Park and Woodhill Park. If you are a business owner and want to find out about how to reduce carbon and make your enterprise more environmentally friendly, please visit www.carboncharter.org where you can find advice, tips and webinars/local events.

Council Gains £8m for Bus Service Improvements

Suffolk County Council has been awarded a grant of £8m from the Department for Transport to fund new and enhanced bus services across the county. The new funding from the government's Local Authority Bus Grant can be used for the following:

- £2,805,076 revenue funding for new or enhanced services
- £5,229,805 capital funding for new and improved bus stops, bus stations or vehicle upgrades

The council plans to use the money to improve bus priority on congested streets, upgrade the Real Time Passenger Information system (giving live updates in bus arrival times), and improve bus stops and routes. It will also use some of the money to look into the journeys people take with a view to creating more innovative fare offers in future and get more people to use bus services. Previous funding has been used for projects such as the first Sunday and evenings service between Bury St Edmunds and Sudbury in over 20 years, and direct links from Haverhill and Mildenhall to West Suffolk Hospital. Details of successful local bids for the funding will be posted on the Suffolk on Board website, and if you are interested in putting forward a bid for future funding, you can find information on how to do that here: <https://www.suffolkonboard.com/news/2024/06/bus-service-improvement-plan-where-should-the-money-be-spent/>

Flood Team Wins Local Government Chronicle Award

The council's Flood Investigations and Grants Team are celebrating after winning a national award for its work supporting the communities affected by flooding caused by Storm Babet in October 2023. The team, which was set up in the immediate aftermath of the storm to help flood victims to apply for grants, won the Local Government Chronicle (LGC) award for Small Team of the Year at a recent awards ceremony at Grosvenor House in London. Over 900 homes and businesses were affected by Storm Babet, which caused the worst flooding in Suffolk for more than 70 years.