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Newsletter

Page 3 - 97.5% of pupils receive a place at one of their preferred Secondary Schools on National Offer Day

This year parents and carers of 97.5% of children were offered a place on National Offer Day at one of their three preferred schools and 91.9% were offered a place at their first preference school.

Page 3 - Council continues to oppose pylons in final round of consultations

Suffolk County Council maintains that more can, and should, be done to improve National Grid's plans for their Norwich to Tilbury pylon project.

Page 5 - Council fears pace of decision for large solar farm in north Suffolk

Suffolk County Council is calling on communities impacted by the proposed EcoPower solar farm, to act with urgency, and join the council in opposing the scheme.

Page 6 - Suffolk County Council confirms decision to bring Library Services back In-House

Suffolk County Council has confirmed that it will be bringing all 45 libraries back under its care and control.

Page 8 - New Travel Toolkit to give young people the confidence to travel independently

A new Travel Toolkit has been launched to help young people to feel confident to travel independently on public transport.

Page 9 - One new council is the best option for Suffolk

A plan setting out the significant benefits of scrapping Suffolk's six councils and replacing them with just one new authority has been agreed by councillors.

Page 10 - 200 new specialist SEND places for Suffolk

The creation of 200 new specialist places across the county for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) is set to be considered by Suffolk County Council's cabinet.

Page 11 - Suffolk Archives exhibition in the running for international award

The Arrivals: Celebrating Migration to Suffolk exhibition, curated by Suffolk Archives, had been nominated for Community Engagement Programme of the Year at the prestigious 23rd annual Museums + Heritage Awards.

Page 12 - Locations in Suffolk announced as the first to become part of the Plug In Suffolk Car Club

Ten locations across Suffolk will be fitted with electric cars that can be booked out by drivers in the community by the minute, hour or day.

Page 14 - Extra £9 million will fund new places for pupils with SEND

Hundreds of children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) in Suffolk are set to benefit from new government funding.

97.5% of pupils receive a place at one of their preferred Secondary Schools on National Offer Day

This year parents and carers of 97.5% of children were offered a place on National Offer Day at one of their three preferred schools and 91.9% were offered a place at their first preference school.

Suffolk County Council received 7831 applications from parents and carers indicating which secondary school they would prefer their child to transfer to in September 2025.

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 on the 3rd of March 2025.

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

“It is really positive that once again the majority of families have been offered a place at one of their preferred secondary schools. We do appreciate that not all families will 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.”

Published criteria were used to decide which children had priority for school places to ensure that the process was fair and clear.

Once school places have been confirmed, parents and carers 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 Thursday 3 April 2025 with details of how-to opt-in and when.

Further information on secondary school admissions can be found at www.suffolk.gov.uk/admissions.

Council continues to oppose pylons in final round of consultations

Suffolk County Council maintains that more can, and should, be done to improve National Grid's plans for their Norwich to Tilbury pylon project.

A final round of consultation for the project in Suffolk has now been completed (3 March 2025), ahead of an expected Development Consent Order application later this year.

The county council has welcomed a series of changes to the latest set of plans, evidence that National Grid has listened to some of the council's concerns and those of local communities.

However fundamental differences remain, with the council clear that offshore and undergrounding solutions should be priorities for the scheme.

One particular blow came at the beginning of this latest consultation, with National Grid writing to local leaders in Norfolk and Suffolk saying that there would be no undergrounding in the Waveney Valley.

Councillor Richard Rout, Suffolk County Council's Cabinet Member for Devolution, Local Government Reform and Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects, said:

"We are bitterly disappointed that pylons are still the go-to solution for this project, and particularly those destined to cut across the Waveney Valley's valued landscape, rather than going underground, or ideally offshore. We still firmly contend that less damaging alternatives to the project have not been properly considered.

"Despite making clear our overall opposition to the scheme, we have influenced some alterations proposed by National Grid, such as the undergrounding of smaller pylons, owned by UK Power Networks in some places, such as the Burgate area, which will reduce the visual and landscape impact and protect the operations of local airfields.

"At the next stage of the process, when the Planning Inspectorate is presented with the plans, we will continue to pursue our preferences for no pylons at all, to make the scheme better and safer for our communities.

"But should pylons ultimately be given the go-ahead across Suffolk, Norfolk and Essex, despite our opposition, we will continue to work with National Grid to make sure communities are fairly treated and compensated – something which has not yet been evident."

One of the considerable changes that the county council believes is possible in the current set of plans, is the option to remove some existing powerlines between Bramford and Lawford.

The county council believes that National Grid, UK Power Networks and the regulator, Ofgem, should work together to investigate removing this line, which goes through two National Landscapes and passes close by the iconic Willy Lott's cottage at Flatford.

Suffolk County Council's response to the latest, and previous, consultations can be found at [suffolk.gov.uk](https://www.suffolk.gov.uk)

According to [National Grid's website](#), they intend to submit a Development Consent Order application to the Planning Inspectorate for the Norwich to Tilbury project some time in 2025.

Council fears pace of decision for large solar farm in north Suffolk

Suffolk County Council is calling on communities impacted by the proposed EcoPower solar farm, to act with urgency, and join the council in opposing the scheme.

- Unprecedented pace of planning application
- Inappropriate proposal which could take out quality farmland
- Serious concerns for welfare of local communities

The 250-megawatt solar farm and battery energy storage system will be spread out over 1,500 acres at multiple sites around Yaxley, Brome, Gissingham, Mellis, Eye and Occold.

EcoPower is proposing the bare minimum of engagement and is likely to submit its application to the Planning Inspectorate in around 12 months from now.

This means, unusually, that residents will have just two opportunities in the coming months to have their say. The first of these two is a non-statutory consultation, launched on 10 March. A statutory consultation will follow.

The council fears that communities won't have enough time to familiarise themselves with the planning process, understand the potential impacts of the project, do their research, and make their points – unfortunately, it is not enough to simply state opposition to the project in a consultation response.

Councillor Richard Rout, Suffolk County Council's Cabinet Member for Devolution, Local Government Reform and Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects, said:

“The speed at which this proposal is moving is frightening for us as statutory consultees, as well as for local communities. It could also set a worrying precedent for future NSIP projects.

“As an example, the Sunnica solar farm, which was opposed by Suffolk County Council, took around six years from being launched, to being approved. The EcoPower project could be wrapped in as little as two years.

“This hurried process adds pressure on the county council, as well as communities, as it will require significant additional resources and staff to manage - on top of the other energy projects and NSIPs that we are already dealing with.

“This breakneck speed is no doubt influenced by the government's unrealistic obsession to decarbonise our electricity supply by 2030. They must slow down to allow for proper planning, coordination of energy projects, and fair treatment of communities.”

The county council is formally opposed solar farm proposals that remove the top grades of agricultural land.

Independently conducted assessments will be required to provide reassurance that Suffolk's best farmland will not be used, and put food security at risk.

The council also has a preference for rooftop-before-rural solar development and expects that solar developers should rule out any links to forced labour in their supply chains.

There are also serious concerns for the welfare of those in the communities affected by the proposed scheme. Such projects can change ways of life forever for those living near the proposed sites.

Councillors have seen first-hand, the stress and worry brought by the sudden announcement of a huge infrastructure projects. This is something that should not be underestimated, and should be recognised by a project promoter.

ClIr Rout continues:

“We will do what we can to support communities through the planning process, and we are currently writing to parish and town councils.

“However from my early meetings with EcoPower, I am concerned that they are not taking seriously the very real mental wellbeing impacts of their proposal.

“Local residents are foremost in my thoughts, and I have already met with some who have seen a real impact on house prices and sales in the area. This takes a huge toll on individuals and families, and EcoPower has a duty of care to our communities and needs to step up in this regard.

“It is a real concern that the Secretary of State will just wave through this project, as he did with Sunnica, despite the Planning Inspectorate’s recommendation not to proceed. But local communities must engage with the process and make their concerns known.

“I urge people to act quickly, and contribute fully and effectively to the consultation, before it closes on 18 April.”

Suffolk County Council has created a number of online resources to support communities who are facing planning proposals for these nationally significant infrastructure projects. These are available at www.suffolk.gov.uk

The EcoPower Suffolk consultation is available at www.ecopowersuffolk.com

Suffolk County Council confirms decision to bring Library Services back In-House

Suffolk County Council has confirmed that it will be bringing all 45 libraries back under its care and control. The decision, made at the Cabinet meeting earlier in March, will ensure continued access to high-quality, community-focused library services across the county. As part of this move, the council plans to:

- **Keep all 45 libraries open**
- **Maintain opening hours**

- **Create job security for all frontline staff**
- **Secure a sustainable future for Suffolk’s library services**

In addition to continuing its core library services, the council is investing £200,000 in mobile libraries, with a further £157,000 for new books and to replace public computers in libraries across Suffolk.

Libraries have long been at the heart of Suffolk’s communities. They are essential spaces for learning, connection, and support, and the council is committed to ensuring they remain hubs that bring people together. The focus is on building upon the excellent services already provided, strengthening libraries’ role as trusted local resources that meet the evolving needs of residents.

Looking to the future, Suffolk County Council envisions libraries becoming even more integrated into the wider community, serving as convenient access points for a range of essential council services. This includes providing information and support around Adult Social Care, offering health and social care services, facilitating Family Hub activities, and promoting digital inclusion. The aim is to make it easier for residents to access vital services and support, all within the welcoming, familiar setting of their local library.

CLlr Philip Faircloth Mutton, Cabinet Member for Environment, Communities and Equality said:

“This was an incredibly difficult, but important decision for the future of our Library Service.

“Libraries are more than just places to borrow books—they are community spaces where people can access vital services, learn new skills, and build connections.

“With this decision, we are securing a bright future for all 45 libraries across the county, ensuring they remain accessible, vibrant, and sustainable for generations to come.”

Suffolk County Council would like to express its sincere gratitude to Suffolk Libraries, who have run the library contract for the past 12 years. Their passion and hard work have been integral to the success of library services in the county, and the council appreciates all they have done to support local communities. We look forward to welcoming library staff back into the county council and continuing to support them in delivering outstanding services to the public.

We would also like to thank the 1,250 volunteers whose commitment has been essential in delivering high-quality services to residents across Suffolk. As we transition the library service back under council control, we remain fully committed to working with our volunteers. Their invaluable contributions will continue to play a central role in the future of our libraries, and we are excited to explore new opportunities to expand volunteer involvement.

The library service will officially return to Suffolk County Council control on **1st June 2025**.

New Travel Toolkit to give young people the confidence to travel independently

A new Travel Toolkit has been launched to help young people to feel confident to travel independently on public transport.

The Independent Travel Toolkit is a website designed to assist young people in learning the skills needed for independent travel, featuring guidance for parents, guardians, carers, schools, and the young travelers themselves.

This week marks Neurodiversity Awareness Week (17th-23rd March) which highlights the importance of being inclusive within our schools and communities to people who are neurodivergent - who think and learn a little differently than most people, such as young people with ADHD, Autism or Dyslexia.

Using public transport can often be a challenge for neurodivergent young people.

The Independent Travel Toolkit has been designed and developed over the past year, in collaboration with young people and parents and carers. Development of the toolkit has been assisted by Suffolk County Council's Passenger Transport team colleagues from the Essex County Council Suffolk Travel Training team, Suffolk County Council Children's and Young People Services, representatives from the Suffolk Parent Carer Forum, and students and staff from Suffolk New College Rural.

Cllr Chris Chambers, Cabinet Member for Transport Strategy, Planning and Waste, said:

"We know that using public transport for the first time is something that can seem daunting for a young person. The Independent Travel Toolkit has been designed to equip young people with everything they need to feel more confident to travel independently, reducing their reliance on others while expanding their opportunities. Whether you're starting to travel independently or need guidance, you'll find useful tools to ensure a safe and successful journey, and we hope the toolkit will encourage more young people to use public transport."

The Travel Toolkit website offers young people a range of useful tools and advice to help them:

- learn about travelling own their own
- prepare for journeys and what to do if things don't go to plan
- feel more confident about using public transport.

There is also useful information to guide parents and carers, and professionals who support a young person.

A short film has been released which forms part of the toolkit, in collaboration with students and staff at Suffolk New College Rural. The video explains in simple steps how to plan and prepare for a bus journey.

Watch the film here: [How to catch a Bus.](#)

We would like for you to feel happy and confident riding the bus in Suffolk. Follow the steps in this video to help you have a safe and successful bus journey, wherever you want to go.

The Independent Travel Toolkit has been funded through the Department for Transport's Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP).

The toolkit is designed to engage, inform and educate young bus users of the future which aligns with BSIP goals.

To find out more, visit: www.independenttraveltoolkit.com

One new council is the best option for Suffolk

Suffolk County Council's cabinet has approved an interim plan for local government reorganisation in Suffolk which will be submitted to ministers. A full business case will be submitted in September 2025, following extensive engagement with residents, town and parish councils, businesses and local organisations.

- [Local Government Reorganisation in Suffolk - Interim Plan](#)

The key benefits of one council are:

- **Simpler for residents** – one council would make it easier to understand and contact local government
- **Clearer accountability** – there would be less confusion over who is responsible for what
- **Better use of funding** – a more coherent, strategic, financially sustainable, county-wide approach to budgeting
- **Safer services** - less risk of breaking up critical services like social care and better alignment with other agencies like health and the police
- **Better alignment of services** – since everything is under one roof, services can be more easily coordinated, creating opportunities to improve services for residents
- **More efficient decision-making** – with just one council, decisions can be made more quickly
- **Connected to and empowering residents** - providing both the most straightforward and accountable democratic leadership with enhanced neighbourhood and community engagement
- **Stronger leadership** – a single, visible and accountable body providing a clear strategic voice for Suffolk.

Speaking about Suffolk itself, **Councillor Richard Rout, Suffolk County Council's cabinet member for devolution, local government reform and NSIPs, said:**

“When people visit Suffolk, it's hard not to fall in love with it. Indeed, if you're lucky enough to live and work here, that love grows strong, anchoring people, families and businesses for generations.

“Whether you’re looking for a place for your children to go to school, a forever home or a location from which to do business, Suffolk gives you options. Sea views, rolling fields, big skies, quiet villages, market towns and bustling urban centres. Although different from each other, our areas exist as part of a coherent and historic geographical area.

“We are proud of Ipswich, our county town. But so are we of the many other places, large and small, that make Suffolk the cohesive place it is. There is, without doubt, a spirit or force that’s hard to describe that connects and unites our great and special county.”

Analysis carried out nationally by the County Council Network has demonstrated that a single unitary council for Suffolk would have a recurring financial benefit of almost £26 million a year – with the net benefit after 5 years being over £103 million. Local analysis of data suggests that the national figures are reasonable.

Speaking about the one council proposal, Cllr Rout said:

“All the evidence shows that one council for Suffolk is the only viable option to deliver significant savings that can be reinvested into frontline services, financial sustainability and maximum clarity and accountability. This is clearly demonstrated in our interim plan and will be expanded upon in the final business case in September.

“The latest independent analysis makes it clear that having a single council for Suffolk will save the most money which can be reinvested into frontline public services that benefit residents, while having three councils would cost the taxpayer more than the current 50-year-old system. The funding could be reinvested in services like pothole repairs, waste collection and disposal, housing, social care, planning, leisure, school placements and travel and street cleaning.

“There’s been talk of creating three unitary councils for Suffolk, including a Greater Ipswich. But that model is without credibility and is financially ruinous. We want to deliver the best possible opportunity to Ipswich and all our market towns and rural communities. The only way to do that is as one Suffolk. A Greater Ipswich would be in financial peril from day one, threatening the very services we want to protect.

“But this isn’t just about money, it’s about people too. A single council will absolutely be able to reflect and serve the whole of Suffolk, and our plans will clearly show how local priorities and residents’ voices can and will be central to decision making.

“If we’re going to create a truly sustainable and effective council structure for Suffolk, then one new council is not just the only viable option, but also the best one.”

200 new specialist SEND places for Suffolk

The creation of 200 new specialist places across the county for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) is set to be considered by Suffolk County Council’s cabinet.

An extra 100 places could open this year, and another 100 new places by September 2026, with future plans being drawn up. These places will be spread across Suffolk and tailored to meet need and demand.

The plan to be presented to cabinet next Tuesday <April 1> outlines how £18.6million could best be spent to support the growing population of SEND children and young people who need specialist education. Over the last five years, Suffolk pupils accessing special schools and units attached to mainstream schools has increased by over 40%.

The proposal includes £3million to be spent on small groups and units in mainstream schools from September 2025 and £12million to be spent on developing satellite units linked to existing special schools across Suffolk from September 2026. The remaining £3.6million is earmarked for further SEND provision.

In the past five years, 1,025 new specialist SEND places across Suffolk have been agreed.

Andrew Reid, cabinet member for education and SEND at Suffolk County Council, said:

“We know the importance of making sure that children are in the right provision for their needs at the right time. We haven’t always got this right and keeping up with the ask for new places is challenging, and costly, but we continue to revisit our plans and redirect resources when needed.

“It’s reassuring to see the level of support we get from headteachers who are willing to open specialist units linked to their mainstream schools. We remain thankful for these offers.”

On top of these new 200 places, future plans will continue to be drawn up. Using the recently published Joint SEND Needs Assessment report, work is underway to create a Joint SEND Sufficiency Plan, written in conjunction with health, social care, inclusion and transport. This will establish how future Department for Education SEND capital money should be spent.

These plans will be discussed at the cabinet meeting on Tuesday April 1st at 2pm. [Read the Cabinet papers.](#)

Suffolk Archives exhibition in the running for international award

The Arrivals: Celebrating Migration to Suffolk exhibition, curated by Suffolk Archives, had been nominated for Community Engagement Programme of the Year at the prestigious 23rd annual Museums + Heritage Awards.

The free exhibition was made possible by The National Lottery Heritage Fund, with Suffolk Archives working closely with community groups to bring it to life.

It explored historical and contemporary migration experiences to Suffolk since the end of World War II. This included oral history recordings, stories of migrant entrepreneurs, and archive materials from the Ipswich and Suffolk Council for Racial Equality. Visitors learned

about Jewish refugees, Polish soldier Marion Laskowski, the Windrush generation, and saw examples of traditional clothing from around the world.

The exhibition also featured a community art installation, The Journey, created in collaboration with local groups, artists, and schools. The installation consisted of 125 birds, made from sustainably sourced plywood, each decorated to represent a unique migration story. The flock is currently on display at The Hold.

Councillor Philip Faircloth-Mutton, Cabinet Member for Environment, Communities and Equality said:

"I am delighted that Arrivals: Celebrating Migration to Suffolk has been nominated for Community Engagement Programme of the Year at the Museums + Heritage Awards.

"This nomination reflects the incredible collaboration between Suffolk Archives, local community groups, and artists. It's a wonderful acknowledgment of how migration stories have shaped our county's history and brought together diverse voices in a meaningful way."

Anna Preedy, Director of Museums + Heritage Awards, said:

"This year's shortlist truly reflects the breadth and depth of the cultural sector and its determination to deliver first-class visitor experiences for all."

The global awards celebrate the very best in the world of museums, galleries, and cultural and heritage visitor attractions. This year's shortlist includes entrants from across the UK and 14 other countries ranging from Norway and Egypt to Australia.

'Arrivals' is competing alongside exhibitions from Chatham Historic Dockyard Trust, Manchester Museum, The Landmark Trust, and Historic England. The winners will be announced on 15th of May.

Suffolk Archives' latest exhibition is Departures, which explores emigration from Suffolk. It runs at The Hold, on Ipswich's Waterfront, until 31st of May, with a programme of tie-in events. Visit www.suffolkarchives.co.uk for more details.

Locations in Suffolk announced as the first to become part of the Plug In Suffolk Car Club

Ten locations across Suffolk will be fitted with electric cars that can be booked out by drivers in the community by the minute, hour or day.

Two cars will be placed at each of the following locations and local residents will receive free membership to the Car Club as well as credit added to their account:

- Ann Street, Ipswich
- Norfolk Road, Ipswich

- Norwich Road, Lowestoft
- Cannon Street, Bury St Edmunds
- Crown Street, Stowmarket
- Castle Street, Woodbridge
- Granary Road, Newmarket
- Station Yard Car Park, Needham Market
- Maiden Way Car Park, Hadleigh
- Girling Street Car Park, Sudbury

With a further location under review for addition to the scheme in Leiston. Visit the [Plug in Suffolk Car Club](#) website to stay up to date with the latest news on the project.

From this summer, residents and visitors across Suffolk will be able to book the cars through [Co Wheels](#) by phone, website or app.

Car Clubs have already been successfully trialled in other parts of the country and have been found to have many benefits including:

- Less petrol and diesel cars on the road which improves air quality and reduces parking pressure
- Lower costs for families by providing a convenient alternative to owning your own car or second car
- Better access to electric vehicles for all in the community
- Support for local businesses who can sign up to the scheme as a business to provide clean transport for their staff

An initial 18-month trial will determine the appetite for a wider scheme across the county so we could see electric community vehicles rolled out to more locations in Suffolk in the future. This innovative project is funded by Suffolk's public sector organisations and managed by Suffolk County Council with additional charge point funding provided by the Department for Transport's On Street Residential ChargePoint Scheme (ORCS).

On the ground, the Car Clubs themselves will be delivered by Co Wheels and the chargepoints provided by Connected Kerb and, for those in their area, Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Council.

Providing Suffolk residents with access to electric community vehicles is just one part of the wider plan to transform Suffolk into a net zero county. You can find out more about this on the [Green Suffolk website](#).

To stay up to date with the project, [sign up to the mailing list](#) or send your questions to the Suffolk County Council Car Clubs team at carclubs@suffolk.gov.uk.

Richard Falconer, Head of Mobility at Co Wheels, said:

"We're excited to expand the Co Wheels network across Suffolk. This expansion marks an important step in our mission to provide sustainable and flexible transport options to

communities across the UK. With Co Wheels, residents can save money, reduce their carbon footprint and enjoy greater transport flexibility— all without the financial and environmental costs of car ownership.

"We look forward to working closely with Suffolk's public sector organisations, local businesses and community groups to make a positive contribution to Suffolk's sustainability goals and its vision for cleaner, greener towns and cities."

Councillor Gerald Kelly, Chair of the Suffolk Councils' Environment Portfolio Holders' Group, said:

"I am thrilled that drivers across Suffolk will be able to access this new fleet of all electric vehicles. I encourage all drivers living near these locations to sign up for the scheme. Not only do these cars provide a cost-effective method of transport for residents in the surrounding areas, but they also help to keep those rarely needed second petrol and diesel vehicles off the roads which improves air quality for all.

"Plug In Suffolk Car Clubs are one way in which we are delivering on the Suffolk Climate Emergency Plan by providing low carbon transport solutions. These community vehicles enable individuals, families and businesses to get involved with our mission to create a net zero Suffolk."

News release issued on behalf of Creating the Greenest County partners.

Extra £9 million will fund new places for pupils with SEND

Hundreds of children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) in Suffolk are set to benefit from new government funding.

It has been announced that Suffolk will receive £9,441,348 from the Department for Education to invest in new SEND school places.

Plans will now be drawn up by the Local Area SEND Partnership.

This funding is in addition to the 200 new SEND places that Suffolk County Council's cabinet will discuss on Tuesday 1st of April.

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

"This investment is a welcome addition for Suffolk's children and young people, and their families.

"In the last five years, we have agreed 1,025 new specialist places. However, our analysis tells us we must continue to invest in new places to keep up with demand. This new funding will support that growth."

Using the recently published Joint SEND Needs Assessment Report, work is underway to create a Joint SEND Sufficiency Plan, written in conjunction with health, social care, inclusion and transport. This will establish how this new money should be spent.

The additional funding, announced on Thursday by the Department for Education, is from the High Needs Provision Capital Allocation and awarded to all local authorities across England. In total, the East of England will receive £126.6 million which will fund around 1,000 places for children with SEND.

The Local Area Partnership, which delivers SEND services in the county, is made up of Suffolk County Council, the NHS Suffolk and North East Essex Integrated Care Board (ICB) and NHS Norfolk and Waveney ICB, the Suffolk Parent Carer Forum and education settings.