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March 2026 Newsletter

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Suffolk County Council has announced a £350,000 investment to resurface the athletics track at Northgate Sports Centre in Ipswich.

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Suffolk County Council is set to discuss the development of a new children's home in Saxmundham, for children with complex needs, at its Cabinet meeting on 27 January.

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Suffolk County Council is set to approve plans for two new primary schools to serve growing communities in Felixstowe and Brightwell Lakes, at a Cabinet meeting on Tuesday 27 January.

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Households across Suffolk can now get free access to an award-winning meal planner to help them eat healthily, save money and reduce food waste.

## [Suffolk County Council proposes new 20mph speed limit policy for communities](#)

A new 20mph speed limit policy to enhance road safety and improve quality of life across Suffolk's communities is to be considered by county councillors.

Suffolk County Council's Cabinet is to discuss a proposal to give communities greater opportunity to reduce the speed limit, where appropriate, in residential and high-pedestrian areas to 20mph.

Studies have shown that reducing speed limits can significantly decrease the number and severity of road accidents.

Slower speeds also contribute to a more pleasant and liveable community, encouraging outdoor activities and fostering a sense of neighbourhood cohesion.

However, the proposal says that 20mph limits can be unpopular with motorists, and with police enforcement capacity limited it was important that such schemes were introduced with community backing to ensure as much local support as possible.

Communities, typically parish or town councils, will be invited to come forward with proposals for 20mph limits, supported by their local county councillor and backed by local engagement.

This could include formal surveys or consultation through neighbourhood plans to demonstrate community support.

It is anticipated that these community led schemes will be locally funded.

As part of the new system Suffolk County Council has developed assessment criteria to consider observed average traffic speeds, the role and character of the road, and the presence of vulnerable road users.

Where average speeds are already low, there will be a presumption in favour of a 20mph limit, often supported by clear signage.

Where speeds are higher, additional measures such as traffic calming may be required to ensure good compliance.

**Councillor Chris Chambers, Suffolk County Council Cabinet Member for Transport Strategy, said:** “This revised policy aims to strike the right balance between local choice and effective delivery of a 20mph limit, helping communities create safer, healthier places to live.

“The current process is complex and lengthy and results in fewer locations meeting the success criteria.

“This new policy approach will provide communities with a tool kit to implement speed reduction when appropriate to make Suffolk roads safer.”

The Cabinet will consider the proposal at its meeting on Friday January 9, and the full paper can be read on the [Suffolk County Council website](#).

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## Council sets out plans for 2026/27 budget

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The £850 million plan aims to safeguard frontline services, support the most vulnerable, and invest in Suffolk’s future – despite rising costs, growing demand and shortfalls in national funding.

Key themes of the draft budget include:

- **Savings and efficiencies:** £46.5 million of savings through service transformation and efficiencies, including a temporary reduction in employer pension contributions, made possible by the strong position of the council’s pension fund.
- **Rising financial pressures:** Increasing demand, in particular for adult and children’s social care, will add £32.2 million in costs, alongside continued pressures from the Dedicated Schools Grant deficit.
- **Reserves:** A one-off use of reserves will bridge a £5.9 million funding gap, while keeping reserves above the minimum level needed to manage financial risks.
- **Capital investment:** The capital programme has been shortened from four years to three ahead of local government reorganisation in 2028. It continues to fund essential projects like school expansions and infrastructure upgrades, as well as new schemes, such as improvements to bus services, public rights of way, and cycling and walking infrastructure.

**"Our priorities are clear: protect frontline services, invest where it will make the most impact, and make the decisions needed to keep Suffolk strong, resilient and ready for the future."**

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

To support these plans, the council has proposed a 4.99% rise in Council Tax, comprising a 2.99% general increase and an extra 2% for adult care. Alongside a forecast 1% rise in the taxbase, this would generate an additional £27.4 million.

For households, this would mean:

- **Band B property:** £25.90 per week, an increase of £1.23 a week (Band B properties are the most common in Suffolk)
- **Band D property:** £33.30 per week, an increase of £1.58 a week.

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

"This is a responsible and realistic budget with a clear purpose: to protect what matters most while making targeted investments in Suffolk's future. It goes beyond simply balancing the books, focusing on strengthening our schools, transport and infrastructure, while keeping essential services stable as we prepare for local government reorganisation in 2028.

"Residents expect high-quality services and care use of public money, and that is exactly what this budget delivers. Transformation and efficiency across the council will ensure every pound spent delivers value for money – for vulnerable people, for families and for our communities.

"We have proposed a Council Tax increase as part of this budget, and that proposal will be debated in February. It is important to be clear that the government's provisional finance settlement assumes that councils will raise Council Tax by the maximum permitted each year, leaving local authorities with limited options if essential services are to be maintained.

"Despite these challenging financial circumstances, our priorities are clear: protect frontline services, invest where it will make the most impact, and make the decisions needed to keep Suffolk strong, resilient and ready for the future."

Councillors will consider the plans at a Scrutiny Meeting on Tuesday 13 January 2026, which will be streamed live on [the council's YouTube channel](#). Relevant papers can be viewed at [committeeminutes.suffolk.gov.uk](http://committeeminutes.suffolk.gov.uk).

The final budget will be agreed by all county councillors at a Full Council meeting on Thursday 12 February 2026.

## Adam Buxton shines a light on the need for more Foster Carers in a new documentary

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Over cups of tea, emptying the dishwasher, Top Trumps, a dog walk and a kick-about in the garden, Adam asks Gary and Catherine the kinds of questions people often have when first considering fostering.

**Adam Buxton said:** “I didn’t really know very much about fostering before I spent time with Gary, Shannon and Catherine. We’ve got 3 children and a dog at home, and the thought of adding another child or more children into our family life blows my mind. What they do, for kids who haven’t asked to be brought into care, amazes me. And Shannon’s reflections as a young person who has helped her parents to foster were just incredible. I’m full of admiration and respect for them and their families.”

Gary, a former logistics manager and now factory worker, his wife and two daughters have been fostering for Suffolk County Council for 12 years. They usually foster children in the short term and have also looked after a young girl with disabilities for a longer time. In response to Adam asking him why they foster, Gary gets emotional and replies tearfully that they do it to give children a childhood.

Catherine, a library book scheme co-ordinator, her husband Sean and their two children have been fostering with Norfolk County Council for six years. They originally planned to foster on a short-term basis but have become long-term foster parents instead. Among Top Trumps and Minecraft sword repairs, Adam asks Catherine why they foster. She gestures around the lounge and replies that they’re giving a child a chance.

**“Foster Carers like Gary, Catherine and their families give children somewhere they can belong; a safe place where they can grow, learn and as Gary says in the film, have the childhood they deserve.”**

**Cllr Bobby Bennett, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People’s Services at Suffolk County Council**

**Cllr Bennett continued:** “Here in Suffolk, we need more families to foster with us. We don’t need perfect families; we need families who can provide children in our care with love, patience and a sense of belonging, we would love to hear from families who want to learn more about fostering with Suffolk County Council.”

The 19-minute documentary can be viewed on the Foster East Youtube channel, below:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M6uiWmxICRU&embeds\\_referring\\_euri=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.suffolk.gov.uk%2F&source\\_ve\\_path=OTY3MTQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M6uiWmxICRU&embeds_referring_euri=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.suffolk.gov.uk%2F&source_ve_path=OTY3MTQ)

Research shows that children thrive best in family environments and more foster carers are urgently needed to make this a reality for the classroom of children who come into care in the east of England. To find out more about fostering,

visit [www.fosterandadopt.suffolk.gov.uk](http://www.fosterandadopt.suffolk.gov.uk)

## Department for Education acknowledges progress - and sets clear expectations for Suffolk's SEND improvement

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In a recent stocktake visit, officers from the DfE reported progress in governance, quality assurance and timeliness, leadership and multi-agency working. They praised a shared commitment to improving outcomes for children and young people with SEND and laid out a number of recommendations for further improvement.

SEND services in Suffolk are delivered in partnership by 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.

The findings of the stocktake visit have been published in a letter addressed to Sarah-Jane Smedmor, Executive Director of Children & Young People's Services at Suffolk County Council, and Dr Ed Garratt OBE, Chief Executive Suffolk and North East Essex Integrated Care Board. You can read the letter [here](#).

The DfE acknowledged work to clear the backlog of Education Health and Care Plans (EHCP) by January and the fact that plans will be delivered above the national average for timeliness. Officers noted a need to ensure that plans reflect families' views and lead to timely, appropriate support.

However, whilst noting considerable improvement evidenced by data, the DfE emphasised the need to translate activity into measurable impact for families, acknowledging that too many families are yet to feel the benefit of this. It also reported that families still experience frustration, especially around statutory processes and communication, and that some planned activities have yet to start, including work to prepare children for adulthood, but steps for effective action are being developed to address this. Concerns also remain about waiting times and assessment for neurodevelopmental needs.

**Sarah-Jane Smedmor, Executive Director of Children & Young People's Services at Suffolk County Council, said:**

“We welcome the Department for Education’s recognition of the progress made across Suffolk, while being clear that we must go further and faster to ensure families genuinely feel the difference.

“Scrutiny from the Department for Education is extremely important as it holds a mirror to every area of reform, offering expertise and sharing best practice from across the country. We know that progress is being made and we are heading in the right direction, but it is doubly reassuring that colleagues at the DfE agree.

“Our priority now is translating those improvements into real, measurable impact for all children and young people with SEND and their families.”

**Dr Ed Garratt OBE, Chief Executive Suffolk and North East Essex Integrated Care Board, said:**

“Improving outcomes for children and young people with SEND depends on strong, joined-up working across education, health and care.

“The progress highlighted in the stocktake reflects the benefits of closer integration, shared leadership and clearer accountability across the system. We are committed to continuing this work, particularly in strengthening mental health and neurodevelopmental pathways and ensuring that children, young people and families receive the right support at the right time.”

**Sue Willgoss, chair of trustees for the Suffolk Parent Carer Forum, statutory co-production partner, said:**

“Some parents and carers appreciate that there has been progress in some areas, but many families are still not experiencing the consistent, high-quality support they need.

“It is vital that improvements in process are driven by genuine co-production, matched by quality and better lived experiences for families. Once meaningful change is established, it needs to be embedded so the same old problems don’t appear again.”

The DfE letter sets out clear next steps for the partnership, including:

- Producing the Local Area Inclusion Plan by 29 January 2026. This replaces the current Priority Action Plan and brings together all strands of improvement work into a comprehensive framework designed to deliver better outcomes across education, health and care
- Delivering a clear strategy for preparing for adulthood and transitions
- Clearing the EHCP backlog and achieving national average timeliness
- Completing a SEND sufficiency strategy (to support specialist places where required and to work with local mainstream schools to support SEND learners) by December 2025
- Strengthening communication, co-production and use of lived experience

The next review of SEND services by the DfE is scheduled for the end of the spring term.

### [Suffolk County Council backs new 20mph speed limit policy for communities](#)

A new 20mph speed limit policy to enhance road safety and improve quality of life across Suffolk’s communities has been agreed by county councillors.

Suffolk County Council’s Cabinet has backed the proposal to make it easier to reduce the speed limit, where appropriate, in residential and high-pedestrian areas to 20mph. Under the new scheme any applications for a 20mph limit in an area where recorded average traffic speeds are 28mph or under is likely to be approved.

The scheme was approved by the Cabinet at its meeting on Friday January 9.

**Councillor Chris Chambers, Suffolk County Council Cabinet member for Transport Strategy, said:** “I am delighted this proposed policy has been accepted, it will make a real difference to the quality of life of our communities.

“This update to the 20mph policy reflects a greater demand for lower speed environments where people live.

“It is not a blanket speed-reduction policy, it is simply a more efficient way of introducing a 20mph limit on roads where it is appropriate to do so.”

Under the new scheme communities, typically parish or town councils, will be invited to come forward with proposals for 20mph limits, supported by their local county councillor and backed by local engagement.

This could include formal surveys or consultation through neighbourhood plans to demonstrate community support.

Assessment criteria will consider observed average traffic speeds, the role and character of the road, and the presence of vulnerable road users.

Schemes will still need local funding, as is currently the case, except where they align with existing council programmes as part of the Local Transport Plan.

Under the scheme, areas with recorded speeds of:

- Below 28mph – likely to be accepted, with a speed limit sign only, although signs warning that a 20mph zone is ahead may be required
- Between 28 - 32mph - unlikely to be acceptable with signing alone. Gateway signing and traffic calming throughout the area may be required
- Above 32mph - Unlikely to be acceptable without extensive traffic calming measures such as road humps, plus night-time lighting. It would also be subject to a Road Safety Audit

The new policy will come into immediate effect for all new applications.

## **One Suffolk: Providing a smarter, simpler and better future for local government**

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Suffolk County Council has today (9 January 2026) confirmed its formal response to the Government’s public consultation on LGR, strongly supporting the One Suffolk plan for a single unitary authority which would save millions and streamline services.

The council’s Cabinet also agreed on its response to the alternative proposal, highlighting its significant concerns around carving Suffolk into three made up areas.

These two consultation responses are set to be submitted to government ahead of its 11 January deadline.

The One Suffolk plan - for a single unitary authority in Suffolk delivering all services locally and county-wide - will save millions and strengthen local services.

Meanwhile the alternative proposal will see Suffolk divided into three new arbitrary areas, cost more than the status quo and put Suffolk's most vulnerable residents at risk.

Ultimately, the decision on the outcome of Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) sits with the Government. However, the public consultation seeks to hear from Suffolk residents as well as named consultees from a wide range of sectors.

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

"Today's discussion is a pivotal moment in the journey of LGR – and one which will have lasting implications for all of us who live and work in Suffolk.

"In our consultation responses, we set out clearly and unequivocally why One Suffolk represents the smartest, simplest and best option for local government in this county.

"It is abundantly clear that One Suffolk is the only financially viable option, delivering improved services for residents while ensuring no adverse impact on our most vulnerable. A single unitary authority gives us the rare opportunity to bring together and harmonise services that make a real difference to our residents and businesses."

"In contrast, our response to the alternative proposal for three unitary councils sets out serious and fundamental concerns. These concerns have been echoed by industry experts across a range of sectors.

"We cannot stand by and allow Suffolk to be carved into three – an outcome that would have serious consequences for the communities that we all represent."

In recent months the One Suffolk proposal has gained support from community leaders across the county, from sectors including business, health, social care, agriculture and tourism. Additionally, leading think tank Centre for Cities produced its report *Priority Growth: How to reorganise local government in 2026*, which explains how One Suffolk is the best option for supporting economic growth.

The alternative proposal, from Suffolk's districts and borough councils, will see the county split into three arbitrary council areas, which could put key services such as social care at serious risk and cost millions to set up.

By creating three new areas across Suffolk, essential county-wide services like adult social care and children's services must be disaggregated - resulting in higher costs and a postcode lottery for the county's most vulnerable residents.

The deadline for responding to the Government's consultation is 11 January 2026 and responses can be completed online.

## Nationally significant Anglo-Saxon burial ground found at Sizewell C site

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- **Ancient graves of two high-status individuals found with weapons and personal items**
- **Discovery sheds fascinating new light on Suffolk society in the 7<sup>th</sup> century**
- **Remarkable archaeological find to feature on BBC Two's *Digging for Britain***

Among the most remarkable discoveries is a high-status grave containing two individuals buried alongside a fully harnessed horse, weapons, and personal items. These finds, dating to the 7th century, suggest the individuals were elite members of Anglo-Saxon society and reflect their complex burial traditions.

The team from Oxford Cotswold Archaeology (OCA), working on behalf of Sizewell C, identified at least 11 burial mounds, known as barrows, along with cremation and inhumation burials. All had been carefully arranged across a prominent point in the landscape near Theberton in Suffolk.

Despite poor bone preservation caused by the local sandy soils, detailed excavation and recording have preserved valuable information about burial practices and social status in early Medieval Suffolk.

Details of the discovery will feature in an episode of [Digging for Britain](#) on BBC Two at 21:00 on Wednesday, 14 January.

**“Suffolk continues to reveal its stunning past, and the magnitude of these discoveries should not be under-estimated... the council's archaeological service plays its part to make sure that our history is not lost.”**

**Councillor Debbie Richards, Suffolk County Council's deputy cabinet member for Archaeology and Landscape Partnerships**

**Len Middleton, OCA's Project Officer leading the site, said:**

“Excavating a section of the Sizewell Link Road has been an exciting experience for me and the team. The site is an early Anglo-Saxon barrow cemetery dating from the 6th to 7th centuries, with both inhumation and cremation burials, many furnished with weapons, jewellery, and vessels. Soil conditions have resulted in little preservation – we are instead left with striking sand silhouettes that capture the outlines of the bodies in remarkable detail.”

“One barrow, containing a horse and two individuals buried with weapons and personal items, stands out as a ‘princely’ burial – part of the same elite tradition seen at Sutton Hoo, Snape and Prittlewell. Discoveries like this are of national importance because they deepen our understanding of power, belief, and identity in early medieval England, and how those ideas were expressed along the East Anglian coast.”

Other significant finds from recent Sizewell C excavations include evidence of Roman industrial activity, such as a well-preserved pottery kiln discovered in Middleton, and an extremely rare Iron Age oak ladder found at the same site.

Excavations at Goose Hill, north of Sizewell, reveal a long history shaped by its coastal setting - from Early Bronze Age farming to Roman salt production and Second World War coastal defences. Archaeologists also uncovered Beaker-period activity, including a well-preserved cremation urn.

**Nigel Cann, Chief Executive Officer, Sizewell C, said:** “The Anglo-Saxon burial ground uncovered during preparatory works for our 6.5km Sizewell Link Road offers a fascinating glimpse into Suffolk’s rich heritage and the lives of its early communities. Working closely with OCA, we have ensured these finds are carefully recorded and preserved for future study. This project demonstrates how major infrastructure developments can contribute to understanding our past while building for the future.”

The construction of Sizewell C, which began in January 2024, has revealed an incredible insight into life along the Suffolk coast.

In 2023, OCA archaeologists, working near the site of the future power station, discovered a remarkable hoard of over three hundred 11th century silver coins encased in lead and cloth. Affectionately nicknamed ‘the pasty’ – due to its resemblance to a Cornish pasty – the hoard is believed to have been a savings pot buried by a local figure as a precaution during a time of significant social and political unrest in the 11th Century.

Last year, the [collection was donated](#) to Suffolk County Council’s Archaeological Service to be curated in Suffolk. It’s also being made available for academic research.

Archaeologists have also uncovered evidence of prehistoric settlements dating back to the Bronze Age, and the remains of numerous medieval ovens and structures.

Many of these artefacts have been showcased through community open days and public talks, helping to bring the region’s rich history to life.

**Rosanna Price, Engagement Manager at Cotswold Archaeology, who features in the new Digging for Britain episode, said:** “These excavations have been a labour of love for field archaeologists and specialist teams across the country. They’re revealing an astonishing 36,000 years of human occupation – from the early wandering of Neandertals to the graft of the first farmers 6,000 years ago, and from the rich culture of early medieval England to the tough training grounds of the Second World War.

“I grew up in Suffolk and cannot overstate the privilege of watching my county’s expansive and epic history be revealed through the hard work of everyone in the OCA team. What an honour to present Digging for Britain and share all this with the people of Suffolk as a positive outcome of the Sizewell C developments.”

Across 70 sites, about 200 OCA archaeologists are excavating roughly 2 million square metres – making Sizewell C the largest and most complex dig of a generation.

**Councillor Debbie Richards, Suffolk County Council’s deputy cabinet member for Archaeology and Landscape Partnerships, said:** "Suffolk continues to reveal its stunning past, and the magnitude of these discoveries should not be under-estimated. It is therefore important that the council's archaeological service plays its part to make sure that our history is not lost."

"We protect and document Suffolk's history and our officers work closely with the team at Sizewell C to ensure that all archaeological investigations are carried out to high standards. The archaeological objects from Sizewell C will be deposited in our archive, allowing us to make them available for future research and museum display."

An OCA open weekend is being held at Yoxford Village Hall on Saturday 21 and Sunday 22, February where items found during Sizewell C excavations will go on display.

The event, which runs from 10:00 to 16:00, will feature artefacts, photographs and videos from across the project, with family activities, and archaeologists on hand to answer questions and discuss what the finds reveal about Suffolk’s past.

For those unable to attend, OCA will also host two free online webinars:

- 25 February – [Beaker Archaeology at Sizewell](#)
- 29 April – Medieval Archaeology at Sizewell

Both sessions will explore the discoveries in more depth, highlighting what the excavations have revealed about life on Suffolk’s remarkable coast over the past 40,000 years.

Security measures will remain in place across archaeological sites.

## **Suffolk County Council appeals against incorrect government Red highways rating**

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Suffolk County Council has called on the Department for Transport to correct a report it says wrongly labels the authority in the worst category of a new ratings system.

The move comes after a meeting with department officials (DfT) on Monday by Councillor Paul West and senior highways officials.

The new system ranks highways authorities using a traffic-light system based on effectiveness in spending the government's highways maintenance funding.

The council says the DfT failed to include in its assessment £10 million of highways funding it brought forward from 2025/26 and invested early in 2024/25.

Had this been included, Suffolk would have received an Amber rating for highways expenditure, consistent with its ratings in road condition and best practice, rather than an overall Red.

**Councillor West, Suffolk County Council Cabinet Member for Operational Highways, said:**  
“That £10 million delivered much welcomed resurfacing ahead of time, but we have now been unfairly penalised for it.

“We fully support transparency in the reporting of highway maintenance performance but transparency can only be meaningful if the data being published is accurate.

“We have demonstrated to the government where it has gone wrong and we want it to recognise its mistake and correct the rating to Amber.

“Make no mistake, we ultimately want a Green status, but it is important that we at least have a ranking that accurately records where we are.”

**Andrew Cook, Executive Director of Growth, Highways and Infrastructure for Suffolk County Council,** said the council was unhappy it was not given the chance to comment on the ratings and accompanying report before it was published by the DfT, and that a request to delay publication to do this had been rejected.

“Other government departments routinely undertake proper due diligence before publishing assessments of this nature,” he said.

“We feel it is unacceptable that this standard was not met on this occasion.”

“Other highways authorities have also voiced concerns about the accuracy of the ratings and there is growing consensus across the highway industry that the DfT mechanism is fundamentally flawed.”

Suffolk Highways continues to perform strongly against national road-condition benchmarks.

In December [it was awarded £2.9 million](#) from the Department for Transport’s 2025/26 Incentive Fund.

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

[Data published on the Department for Transport \(DfT\) website](#) shows only 3% of Suffolk’s A-road network is in poor condition, better than the England average, with the proportion in good condition broadly aligned to the national figure.

Suffolk’s B and C roads also outperform national averages, with a high share in good condition and significantly fewer in poor condition.

The DfT-reported data also shows that the overall condition of Suffolk’s entire road network has consistently improved since 2011 across all road categories.

**Angela Jones, President of the Association of Directors of Environment, Economy, Planning and Transport**, has said the newly published ratings raise significant questions about the assessment methodology and has called for local authorities to have the opportunity to verify data and clarify any factual questions before ratings are published, to ensure accuracy and build confidence in the system.

Her full statement can be read here: [ADEPT's response to government pothole ratings map](#)  
[ADEPT](#)

## Young people's voices shape Suffolk's 2025 Annual Public Health Report

The event brought together partners from across the public, voluntary and community sectors to listen to young people who were involved in creating the report, using hackathon events to explore what matters most in their communities.

Attendees discussed how youth social action improves physical and mental health, with potential to address health inequalities across Suffolk.

For the first time, Suffolk's Annual Public Health Report is predominantly video based, sharing real-life stories and experiences from young people across the county. A key part of the report focuses on three youth-led "hack" events, delivered in partnership with Volunteering Matters, bringing together young people and local partners to talk about what helps young people thrive and what gets in the way.

Conversations at the launch highlighted the importance of putting young people at the heart of decisions that affect them and how to put the report's recommendations into action.

Stuart Keeble, Executive Director of Public Health and Communities at Suffolk County Council, said:

"This year's Annual Public Health Report represents an important step forward for Suffolk. By listening directly to young people, we have a clearer understanding of the challenges they face and what supports their wellbeing. The report shows that youth social action can play a central role in improving health and reducing inequalities. Our focus now must be on acting on what young people have told us and working with them to make lasting improvements."

The launch is part of a programme that will support young people aged 11–20 (and up to 25 with additional needs) to design and lead projects that make a positive difference in their local areas.

It will focus on increasing access to high-quality youth-led opportunities, particularly for young people in rural, coastal, low-income, minority and marginalised communities.

The 2025 Annual Public Health Report, including all videos and supporting case studies featured in the report, can be viewed here: <https://www.healthysuffolk.org.uk/jsna/annual-public-health-reports/annual-public-health-report-2025>

## £350,000 investment announced by Suffolk County Council to resurface popular running track at Northgate Sports Centre

Funded through the Ipswich Investment Fund, the new track will secure its use for the next 20 years.

This investment will be delivered alongside a new operating model, with Northgate High School agreeing to take on the operational and financial management of Northgate Sports Centre and the athletics track at the Sidegate Lane site from 1 April 2026.

### **Councillor Paul West, Cabinet Member for Ipswich at Suffolk County Council, said:**

“This £350,000 investment is about protecting a strategically important sports facility for Suffolk.

“Resurfacing the athletics track secures long-term use for the school, numerous running clubs and the wider community, while the new operating model with Northgate High School ensures the site can be run sustainably and continues to thrive.”

The athletics track, which was last re-laid in 1999, is now at the end of its operational life. The planned works, expected to take place in summer 2026, will allow the track to meet accreditation standards and remain in use for an estimated further 20 years.

Northgate Sports Centre supports tens of thousands of visitors each year, including around 20,000 athletics track users, and is home to several established clubs, including Ipswich Harriers Athletics Club, Orwell Panthers Disabled Athletics Club and Ipswich Jaffa Running Club. As a regional athletics venue, the site also attracts competitors from outside the county.

Since 2023, the centre has been commissioned and managed by Suffolk County Council and operated by Vivify, following the withdrawal of Ipswich Borough Council.

Alongside the track investment, the county council has made substantial improvements to the wider site over the past three years, including a refurbished Multi-Use Games Area (MUGA), tennis and netball courts, energy-efficient internal and external lighting, and essential fire safety works. These improvements have strengthened the centre’s long-term viability and reduced running costs.

From April 2026, Northgate High School will manage day-to-day operations, with community and club use continuing during evenings, weekends and school holidays, and without detracting from the work or finances of the school. A transitional revenue contribution of £30,000 from Suffolk County Council will support the early years of the new operating model and help maximise use of the upgraded athletics track.

**Rowena Mackie, Headteacher of Northgate High School, said:**

“We’re incredibly lucky to have such well-used and popular sports facilities on our school site. We recognise the importance of the centre’s facilities to the wider community and, with support from community user groups, will work to maximise use beyond the school day.

“The additional investment from the county council will strengthen this offer for our students and the local community and secure its use for generations to come.”

**Councillor Andrew Reid, Cabinet Member for Education and SEND at Suffolk County Council, added:**

“Northgate Sports Centre is a vital asset for Ipswich and Suffolk, supporting local clubs, inclusive sport and regional competition.

“This significant investment will meet growing demand for sports facilities, protect opportunities for future generations and further strengthen this high-achieving school.

“Without Northgate High School’s support, we would not be in this positive position, and we are grateful that this will secure future community use. Our thanks also go to Vivify for their success in running such a thriving site.”

**Ed Hunt, Facilities and Planning Manager at England Athletics, said:**

“This investment is fantastic news for the local community and the athletics clubs that call Northgate home.

“The track is a vital hub for grassroots athletics, supporting thousands of athletes from Ipswich Harriers, Orwell Panthers, Ipswich Jaffa and beyond. Resurfacing will ensure continued access to a safe, high-quality facility for training and competition for years to come.

“We’re hugely grateful to Suffolk County Council for recognising the value of athletics and safeguarding a venue that plays such an important role in local sport.”

## County Council set to approve much-needed provision for children with complex needs

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Papers published today set out plans for the new provision, which will provide purpose-built Ofsted-registered accommodation, improving outcomes for children and reducing reliance on high-cost, private placements.

Following a successful bid, £1.4m of Department for Education funding has been secured for the project, which will be match-funded with a further £1.4m from Suffolk County Council.

Nationally, councils are facing growing demand and increasing complexity of need. Suffolk is facing the same pressures, with more children coming into care, and children entering care later with lived experiences meaning that they often require more specialist care and support at higher costs.

A lack of choice in the current care market means there is a critical need for local, Ofsted-registered placements for children with complex needs in Suffolk.

If approved, the new accommodation will deliver much-needed additional capacity to support children with complex needs in Suffolk. The proposed home will provide a stable, therapeutic and nurturing environment, designed to improve the health, education, and behavioural outcomes for the children cared for.

The numbers of children in Suffolk County Council's care fluctuate on a daily basis. There are currently around 900 children in care in Suffolk, with approximately 20 requiring residential accommodation.

**Cllr Bobby Bennett, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People's Services, said:**

"Like many County Councils, Suffolk is seeing a rise in the number of children and young people with complex needs who need the right care and support. This is a growing challenge for local authorities across the country, with these pressures only likely to increase.

"The new provision proposed at Saxmundham will provide much needed additional capacity to support these children and young people, avoiding the need for private care arrangements which can come at a much higher cost.

"Increasing our in-house accommodation will help more Suffolk children to continue living close to where they would call home, whilst providing the bespoke care and support that they need."

It is estimated that the current cost for a child with complex needs living in private provision is approximately £16.4k per week. In the proposed accommodation, this cost would reduce to approximately £12k per week, offering a saving of up to £4.4k per child per week.

The papers outline that for two children living at the accommodation, this would represent an annual saving of £454.8k and by Year 3, a potential saving of £1.4m.

**Cllr Bennett added:** "It is our duty to ensure we are getting the best value for money, so that our limited budget can be spent on delivering for children and families who need it the most."

If Cabinet gives its approval for the development, planning approval will be sought for June 2026, with construction to complete in September 2028 and Ofsted registration by the end of 2028.

Suffolk County Council is due to discuss the development of the new provision at its Cabinet meeting of 27 January.

## Cabinet set to approve academy trusts for two new Suffolk primary schools

The schools, which are both due to open in 2028, will be built at the North Felixstowe Garden Neighbourhood and the Brightwell Lakes development on the eastern edge of Ipswich. Together, they will provide hundreds of new school places for families moving into the developments.

Cabinet members will be asked to approve recommendations to appoint Unity Schools Partnership as the preferred academy trust to run the new primary school in North Felixstowe, and Children’s Endeavour Trust as the preferred trust to run the new school at Brightwell Lakes.

The recommendations follow a competitive process to identify academy trusts with the experience and capacity to establish and run the new schools. Eleven applications were received, with three trusts shortlisted and interviewed in July 2025 by a panel of council officers and local councillors.

Subject to Cabinet approval, the council will submit its recommendations to the Secretary of State for Education, who will make the final decision through the Department for Education’s Regional Director.

The Brightwell Lakes primary school will be a two-form entry school, providing up to 420 places, including early years provision, with the ability to expand as the development grows. The North Felixstowe school will initially be a one-form entry school, providing up to 210 places, also including early years provision, and is expected to be the first of two primary schools planned for the wider garden neighbourhood in Trelawny Place.

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

“We were pleased at the level of interest we received for these two new Suffolk schools and the high number of applications to run them.

“We hope that the appointment of academy trusts at this stage will allow them to be involved in the final phases of school design and operational planning, helping to ensure the schools are ready to open on time and deliver high-quality education from the outset.”

Both schools will be designed to be carbon neutral, with strong walking and cycling links to nearby homes, outdoor sports facilities, and will offer use of facilities to the community. Locating schools within the new developments will help families access education locally while reducing the need for additional home-to-school transport.

## Mayor of Ipswich visits fire service to learn more about community safety

Councillor Stefan Long, Mayor of Ipswich, spent a day with Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) on Tuesday 20 January, to gain a deeper understanding of its prevention, protection, operational and training activities across the county.

The visit followed an initial conversation between the Mayor and members of SFRS's Prevention Team at a Care Fayre in Kesgrave last year. After hearing about the extent of community safety work carried out across the organisation, Councillor Long expressed a keen interest in learning more.

As a result, Chief Fire Officer Jon Lacey invited him to spend a day with the Service. Councillor Long began the day at SFRS Headquarters at Endeavour House on Russell Road, Ipswich, where he was welcomed by Deputy Chief Fire Officer Henry Griffin and given an overview of the Service's strategic work.

He then visited Princes Street Fire Station, meeting Group Manager Lee Wilkins, Temporary Station Manager Ann Hurst, and other members of the Protection and Prevention teams to hear about their efforts to keep Suffolk residents safe in their workplaces and homes.

The Mayor also toured the station, where he met the on-duty crew and learned more about the operational response capabilities that support communities across Ipswich and beyond. The visit continued at the SFRS Control Centre at Beacon House, where Station Manager Georgina Trownson introduced the Mayor to the team responsible for handling emergency calls and coordinating fire and rescue responses across the county.

In the afternoon, Councillor Long travelled to Wattisham Training Centre, where Group Manager Dale Nunn provided a tour of the Service's specialist training facilities used by firefighters to develop and maintain essential skills.

Commenting on the visit, Councillor Long said: "It was a privilege to spend the day with Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service and see first-hand the dedication, professionalism and community spirit that runs through every part of the organisation."

He continued: "The breadth of work carried out across the Service plays a vital role in keeping people safe, and I appreciated gaining a deeper understanding of the commitment shown throughout the organisation to serving our county."

Chief Fire Officer Jon Lacey said: "We were delighted to welcome the Mayor and provide an insight into the broad range of work our teams undertake every day. From prevention and protection to emergency response and training, our staff are committed to keeping Suffolk safe, and it's always valuable to share that work with our civic leaders."

## Helping households to save money, eat well and reduce food waste

Feel Good Suffolk provides free support to residents who want help managing their weight, getting more active and to stop smoking. Now it has now teamed up with FiveDinners.com The online platform founded by TV chef and author Theo Michaels is already working with NHS Trusts and a number of other councils supporting over 30,000 members.

Now through the partnership with Feel Good Suffolk, it is offering households across the county free premium access for this year to the platform which would otherwise cost them £86 a year.

Residents simply have to visit <https://FiveDinners.com/MyCommunity> select the district council area that they live in and then put in their postcode - they won't be asked for any bank details which means they won't be charged for using the service.

Once registered, they will receive a meal plan every week, tailored to their needs and preferences. This can be personalised for low calories, child friendly, low cost, vegetarian, gluten-free, quick and easy, menopause friendly and more. Alongside the meal plan, members receive a shopping list for the week ahead, which automatically adjusts to the number of people they are cooking for.

The idea is that through meal planning, the service can help people manage a healthy weight with nutritious meals and portion control. That in turn can also help reduce household food waste and save households money.

“As a father of three and working fulltime I know how hard it can be for many families and individuals to figure out what to cook every night - it is a faff!” said Theo Michaels. “By working with Feel Good Suffolk we’re making it easier for families to enjoy delicious, affordable, home-cooked meals together while helping them save money and cut food waste. And because the plans are personalised, residents set their preferences; number of people they are feeding, allergies, etc. and get a brand-new personalised meal plan with a complete shopping list every week.”

Stuart Keeble, Executive Director of Public Health & Communities at Suffolk County Council said:

“A key aspect of the Feel Good Suffolk service is our work with partners to foster healthy eating, reduce food waste and help people with the cost of food.

“By providing all households with free access to FiveDinners.com, our aim is to provide positive, practical support so that our residents can get the best possible access to nutritious meals, supporting healthier lifestyles, reducing the stress of meal planning, helping people to manage food shopping costs as well.”

For more on Feel Good Suffolk and how it can help people manage their weight, get more active and stop smoking, visit <https://feelgoodsuffolk.co.uk>