July 2026 Parish Report

Suffolk County Council Halesworth Division

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Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) Update
Suffolk is currently scheduled to move from its existing two-tier local government structure (county, district and borough councils) to three new unitary councils, with implementation planned for April 2028 and elections for the new authorities expected in May 2027. Suffolk County Council has decided to proceed with a legal challenge against the government's decision regarding the proposed reorganisation. The decision follows an announcement made in May that the council intended to challenge the legal basis of the government's plans.

The legal action has raised concerns among some councillors regarding potential costs to the public purse and the possible impact on preparations for the planned transition to the new unitary authorities. Supporters of the challenge argue that it is important to test the legal basis of the Government's decision before the reorganisation proceeds. The district councils could become 'interested parties' in this challenge, drawing these other councils into the action along with legal costs over and above the £500,000 identified from the county council's reserves to pay for it. The council says it has taken all possible costs into account with the £500,000 figure.

Post-16 Travel Policy Agreed for 2026-27
At Cabinet on Tuesday 16 June, the council considered the proposed Post-16 Travel Policy for the academic year 2026-27. The council is required to publish an annual policy to set out the charges for students over 16, as it receives no funding from the government to provide travel for them – despite it now being a legal requirement for young people to be in education or training until they are 18. The council consulted on the new policy in March 2026, with no changes to charging proposed for the second year in a row. The charges therefore remain:

- £1,050 for a mainstream seat
- £780 for students with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)
- The 50% discount remains in place for:
  Students from low-income families receiving Free School Meals
  Students with an EHCP or SEND (including those without an EHCP but unable to travel independently due to disability) who also receive Free School Meals

There are currently 30,471 pupils in Suffolk who are eligible for Free School Meals, a 91% increase since 2020.

Some post-16 education providers also provide bursaries which can assist families on a low income with travel costs, and cheaper travel may also be possible via public transport in some cases, so parents and carers are recommended to look into these options too.

Funding Agreed for A140 Major Road Network Planning
Cabinet on Tuesday 16 June also agreed funding of up to £1.35 million for the council to develop a business case for improvements to the A140/A1120 junction in Earl Stonham. The Department for Transport has indicated it

would be willing to pay 85% of the project's cost, with the council providing the rest. The council's Cabinet voted to approve the proposal, although my group and other opposition councillors pointed out that the ability of the council to fulfil its financial obligations were far from certain, particularly if the works were delayed and the costs increased, as the government's financial contribution would remain at 85% of the cost set out in the business case with the council liable for any extra spend. The proposed works are also close to an ecologically sensitive parcel of land which contains rare orchids. The next step will be for a full business case to come back to Cabinet in mid-2027, with work predicted to start at the site in 2028.

Increased Support for Apprenticeships

Businesses in Suffolk will now benefit from extra support to recruit and train their workers because of the expansion of the Levy Support Scheme, which will now enable large employers to transfer levy funds to other businesses. Major employers such as East Coast College and Suffolk County Council have already pledged or are planning to pledge unused levy funding so that micro-businesses and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) can train up their employees at reduced or no cost to them. The scheme was started by Apprenticeships Norfolk, who oversaw more than £6 million transferred to over 280 businesses. Businesses who are interesting in pledging unused levy funding can find out further information on the scheme here: https://www.apprenticeshipsnorfolk.org/article/71670/Levy-Support-Scheme
Businesses in Suffolk who want advice on apprenticeships and skills can contact Apprenticeships Suffolk by email on apprenticeships@suffolk.gov.uk

£3.6 Million Investment in New Fire Engines

Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service has invested over three million in a new fleet of fire engines across the county. The eleven new fire engines are in addition to the existing fleet and have been bought as part of the service's ongoing fleet renewal programme to make sure fire engines are up to date and reliable. The new engines will be delivered later this year and will be active at fire stations from November. The fire service is also celebrating the first anniversary of its new fire control room, which is based in west Ipswich. The new control system was recently shortlisted in the International Critical Communications Awards, the leading awards in the sector, in the category 'Best Use of Critical Communications in Public Safety'.

Suffolk Against Fraud Partnership Launched

Suffolk Trading Standards has teamed up with Suffolk Constabulary and businesses in the county to launch Suffolk Against Fraud. This means they will work together to investigate, share information and prepare campaigns to raise awareness and protect vulnerable people and small businesses from the effects of fraud, which now accounts for over 40% of criminal offences in Suffolk. Residents who think they may have been a victim of fraud should report it at www.reportfraud.police.uk or by calling 0300 123 2040. If money has already been transferred, they should contact their bank immediately. In addition, Suffolk Trading Standards are very active on social media and will post information regularly about current scams that local communities and businesses should be aware of.

Fourth Annual NSIP Conference Held in Ipswich

Suffolk County Council welcomed representatives from councils all over the country to its fourth annual conference on Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs), which was held at The Hold in Ipswich on 17 June. There were speakers from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero, legal experts and industry organisations. The government was questioned on its plans to reform the NSIP system, as it is currently consulting on reducing the role of councils in the delivery of energy transmission projects. Other topics discussed included how communication by project

promoters can improve relations with host communities, what local authority good practice looks like in dealing with NSIPs, and an update from Suffolk County Council and East Suffolk Council on the challenges so far with Sizewell C. Suffolk County Council is recognised as a NSIP Centre of Excellence in the UK, following experience of around 20 large scale projects in the county including offshore wind, solar developments and National Grid reinforcement projects.

Social Media and Helpful Links

Follow us on:

Instagram - https://www.instagram.com/scc.green/

Facebook - https://www.facebook.com/suffolkgreens/

Group Website - https://suffolkgreens.org.uk/

Cost of Living help and advice:
https://infolink.suffolk.gov.uk/kb5/suffolk/infolink/family.page?familychannel=6

Benefits advice and support:
https://infolink.suffolk.gov.uk/kb5/suffolk/infolink/adult.page?adultchannel=0

Flood preparation advice:
https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/suffolk-fire-and-rescue-service/fire-and-rescue- safety-advice-in-the-community/what-to-do-in-a-flood

https://suffolkprepared.co.uk/get-prepared/risk-advice/flooding/

Flood recovery advice and support:
http://www.suffolk.gov.uk/about/flood-recovery-information-for- suffolk