

Report for Parish Councils, Oct 2026

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1. Proposed Advisory Referendum on Asylum Seeker Accommodation

During Suffolk County Council's October meeting, councillors approved a motion to explore the possibility of holding a county-wide referendum on the housing of asylum seekers in Suffolk. The motion does not commit the Council to holding a referendum but asks officers to examine the legal, practical and financial implications and report back with options for councillors to consider. The proposal discussed by councillors envisaged that any referendum, if ultimately approved, could be held alongside the district council elections scheduled for May 26.

2. Suffolk County Council Budget Update

Suffolk County Council has reported an estimated £7.8 million overspend in its 2026/27 budget based on Quarter 1 forecasts. The council has stated that immediate action is being taken to reduce spending and identify savings across services to bring the budget back under control by the end of the financial year. The new administration has instructed senior officers to accelerate work on efficiency measures, review expenditure and seek better value from suppliers, while maintaining a focus on frontline services. The financial position will be considered by Cabinet, with the council stating that its approach is guided by its strategic priorities of managing money responsibly, putting residents' needs first and delivering value for taxpayers.

3. Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs)

Suffolk County Council's Cabinet Member for Planning, Devolution and the Fire Service, Councillor Tristan Gale, recently visited East Suffolk communities affected by major energy infrastructure proposals, including Sizewell C and future transmission projects. Meeting with residents, community groups and stakeholders, he heard first-hand concerns about the cumulative impacts on local communities, businesses, the environment and Suffolk's countryside. The visit forms part of a wider programme of engagement with communities affected by Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects across Suffolk. The Council's revised Energy, Water, Commercial Transport, Climate and Adaptive Infrastructure Policy is due to be considered by Cabinet on 12 November 2026.

4. Highways

Over 140km of Suffolk roads treated as 2026 surface dressing programme comes to an end: Suffolk Highways has completed its 2026 surface dressing programme, with 141km of roads treated across 86 sites throughout the county. Surface dressing is a preventative maintenance treatment that helps extend the life of roads, improve skid resistance and reduce the need for more costly repairs in future. The programme also trialled new Variable Message Signs to improve public information and a product called Lockchip to reduce loose chippings, both of which may be considered for wider use in future schemes.

A14 and Orwell Bridge Resilience Study: Suffolk County Council's Cabinet has approved the next stage of work to investigate long-term solutions to improve resilience on the A14 corridor around Ipswich and the Orwell Bridge. The council will now prepare a Pre-Strategic Outline Business Case (PSOBC), bringing together updated evidence and assessing a range of potential options before any decisions are made on future schemes. The study will examine six broad options, including a new Orwell crossing, a crossing with a direct A12 link, a northern bypass of Ipswich, an Upper Orwell-style town centre crossing, a package of local resilience measures, and the potential impact of increased public transport use in reducing traffic pressures. The work is expected to take around six months and will be funded from existing Local Transport Grant allocations, at a cost of up to £300,000. The outcome will provide the evidence base needed to determine whether any option should be developed further. Importantly, this decision does not commit the County Council to any particular scheme at this stage.

Road Safety Campaign: Suffolk County Council has launched a six-week countywide campaign reminding drivers to give way to pedestrians and cyclists when turning at side roads and junctions, in line with Highway Code Rule 206. The campaign forms part of the council's ongoing work to improve road safety and encourage consideration for all road users. Advertising and awareness activities are taking place across Suffolk, including on local radio, buses and social media.

5. Suffolk Creates 648 New School and SEND Places

Suffolk County Council has announced the creation of 648 additional school and Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) places for the 2026/27 academic year, including 243 new SEND places delivered through an £8.6 million investment in specialist provision across the county.

The additional capacity includes:

- 405 mainstream school places, including expansions at Lakenheath Primary School and Stowmarket High School, together providing an extra 405 places.
- 243 SEND places across special schools, specialist units attached to mainstream schools, and small group provision, helping more children and young people access support closer to home.

The council has also confirmed that work will begin this month on further expansion projects at Ormiston Endeavour Academy and Thurston Primary School, which are expected to provide a further 510 places by 2027.

The investment supports Suffolk County Council's priority of ensuring children and young people can access the right educational provision and specialist support within their local communities wherever possible.

6. Unfair Government funding for Suffolk's children

Suffolk County Council is calling on the Government to provide fairer funding for children's services and education, arguing that Suffolk receives less funding than many comparable areas despite growing demand. Simon Aalders, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People's Services, has written to the Education Secretary and Suffolk MPs seeking support for a review of current funding arrangements. The Council says fairer funding would help ensure Suffolk's children and young people have the same opportunities as those elsewhere in the country.

7. School Admissions for September 2027

Applications are now open for children due to start primary, infant, junior or secondary school in September 2027. Parents and carers are encouraged to submit their applications online and to consider more than one school preference to maximise their chances of securing a preferred school place. The closing date for secondary school applications is 31 October 2026, while applications for primary, infant and junior school places must be submitted by 15 January 2027. Applications received after these deadlines will be processed after all on-time applications have been considered. The Council reports that for September 2026 admissions, 94% of applicants were offered their first preference school, with 98.4% receiving an offer from one of their top three preferred schools. Further information on school admissions, together with the online application process, is available through Suffolk County Council's admissions service. The authority has also reminded families planning to move house before September 2027 that applications should still be submitted on time using their current address. I would encourage any families with children due to start school in September 2027 to review the available information and ensure applications are submitted before the relevant deadline.

8. Division Contact and Support

If you have specific issues regarding local county services, school transport allocations, or unresolved highways defects, please contact me with your relevant case reference numbers.

Please get in touch with me if you have questions or comments: Paul.Bains@suffolk.gov.uk
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