**February County Report - Henry Lloyd**

I do hope that the winter weather we received so coldly in January as not frozen to many of you out of an interest in the local goings on in and around your parishes.

Feb 04, 2025

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As ever I am contactable should you need anything, and for those holding your parish meetings this month, I look forward to seeing as many of you as possible. Now onto the report…

**Primary school application deadline approaches**

Parents and carers have until Wednesday 15 January 2025 to submit an application to secure their child’s place at a primary, infant or junior school for September 2025. Applications should be made for children born between 1 September 2020 and 31 August 2021 who are due to start primary school from September 2025.

An application for a full-time school place must be made even if a child is already attending a nursery class in an infant or primary school, a pre-school or a family hub next to a school site.

If you are planning to move house, or you think your circumstances may change before September, it is still essential to make an application on time using the child’s current address. Further information to help parents and carers with this process is available at [www.suffolk.gov.uk/admissions](http://www.suffolk.gov.uk/admissions).

Applications should be made online as this will mean parents and carers will receive a confirmation of their application. They can then log onto the online service on the National Offer Day (Wednesday 16 April 2025) to see their school place offer and they will also be sent an email to confirm this offer on the same day.

If a parent or carer is unable to apply online then they should complete a paper application (CAF1), however these cannot be acknowledged, so it is suggested parents and carers obtain proof of postage. For those who completed paper applications, offer letters will be sent out by second class post on the National Offer Day.

School Travel eligibility is based on a child attending their nearest suitable school that would have had a place available. This might not be the catchment area school. To find out more about SCC’s school travel policy please visit [www.suffolkonboard.com/schooltravel](http://www.suffolkonboard.com/schooltravel).

Applications can be made at [www.suffolk.gov.uk/admissions](http://www.suffolk.gov.uk/admissions), where further advice and guidance is also available. Alternatively, parents and carers can call 0345 600 0981 for a paper application (CAF1).

Last year, Suffolk County Council offered 96.5% of children a place at the primary school their parent or carer listed as their first preference when they applied on time. If parents and carers do not apply by the closing date, their application may not be dealt with until after places have been offered to those who applied on time.

**Council’s budget prioritises vulnerable residents and essential services**

Suffolk County Council has unveiled its proposed budget for 2025/26, with a strong focus on supporting vulnerable residents across the county.

Under the proposals, the council’s net budget would rise by 6.7%, from £752.9 million in 2024/25 to £803.7 million in 2025/26. Key allocations include:

* £18.1 million extra for children’s services, ensuring continued support for young people and families in need
* £35.2 million extra for adult care, aimed at addressing the growing demand for social care services.

To help fund these essential services, the council is proposing a 4.99% rise in Council Tax. This would consist of a 2.99% increase in general Council Tax and an additional 2% specifically for adult care services.

This means the costs for a household would be:

* **Band B property**: £24.67 per week, a £1.17 increase from 2024-25
(Band B properties are the most common in Suffolk)
* **Band D property**: £31.72 per week, a £1.51 increase from 2024-25.

The council will also receive £12.1 million of the additional £880 million allocated by the government for adult and children’s social care. It also expects to receive £2.2 million of the £263 million earmarked for a new Children’s Services Prevention Grant.

To balance the books, the council has also identified £10.9 million in additional savings, building on the £17.5 million approved last year. This brings the total savings to £28.4 million for the 2025/26 financial year.

**Cllr Richard Smith MVO, Suffolk County Council’s Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Economic Development and Skills, said:**

*“We remain committed to supporting vulnerable children and adults in Suffolk. Despite the financial challenges posed by increasing demand and broader economic pressures, we are proposing a balanced budget without drawing on unallocated reserves.*

*“It is deeply disappointing that, despite our significant deprivation levels, Suffolk will receive nothing from the government’s new £600 million Recovery Grant. Further, the scrapping of the Services Grant and Rural Services Delivery Grant will see £3.7 million struck from our budget.*

*“Nevertheless, we understand the pressures facing families and businesses in Suffolk, and that is why we will continue to ensure every pound we spend delivers the best value for our residents.”*

The budget proposals will be presented at a Scrutiny Meeting on Tuesday, 14 January 2025. The meeting will be live-streamed on [Suffolk County Council's YouTube channel](https://www.youtube.com/user/SuffolkCC), and relevant papers can be viewed on [the committee minutes page](https://committeeminutes.suffolk.gov.uk/).

The final budget will be debated and voted on at a Full Council meeting on Thursday, 13 February 2025.

**Unique landscape to be changed forever by pylons**

A large area of landscape on the Norfolk/Suffolk border with particular uniqueness, rivalling those of other nationally protected landscapes, is set to be decimated by pylons as part of National Grid’s Norwich to Tilbury project.

In a letter to both Norfolk County Council and Suffolk County Council, and other local leaders, National Grid has outlined that it has decided to install overhead lines through the Waveney Valley, rather than running cables underground, as they had set out in their previous consultation.

This is a significant blow to local communities and the natural environment, especially following last year’s [Valued Landscape Assessment](https://suffolklandscape.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Waveney-Valley-Valued-Landscape-Final-Report-17-April-2024.pdf), a report jointly commissioned by Norfolk County Council and Suffolk County Council.

The report concluded that “the length of the Waveney Valley expresses many special qualities, and in the context of Suffolk and Norfolk, it is considered to be a valued landscape. Conserving and enhancing the special qualities articulated in this report is a key aspiration of existing planning policy.”

**Councillor Richard Rout, Suffolk County Council’s Deputy Cabinet Member for Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects, said:**

*“This decision not to underground any of the proposed pylons through the Waveney Valley, is nothing short of contemptible. The study we commissioned saw the area recognised as a valued landscape and National Grid’s plans will wreak untold damage on it. There was a clear alternative to this and they’ve chosen not to take it.*

*“What I find particularly flagrant - if this what National Grid will press ahead with - is a lack of any suggestion of mitigation or compensation package for the local area.*

*“This council has engaged fully with discussions and consultations on Norwich to Tilbury, providing additional evidence to help protect the affected communities and environment in the Waveney Valley. We have worked closely and in good faith with National Grid, and yet they have not delivered a fair deal for the local area. There is nothing on the table from them, or Ofgem, to soften this blow.*

*“Yet again, I see this as more evidence of the government’s short-sighted and rushed mission to decarbonise the grid by 2030. Their influence is pushing through the cheapest and fastest options, with no consideration for local residents, businesses or the environment – we are still to see any progress from them on community benefit schemes, to support situations just like this.*

*“As a council, we still maintain that the opportunity to underground the whole pylon run between Norwich and Tilbury, using HVDC cables, has not been properly explored. Revisiting the 2030 decarbonisation target and pausing the project would allow that to happen."*

**Councillor Kay Mason Billig, Leader of Norfolk County Council, said:**

*“The decision by National Grid to plough on with the destruction of our countryside is disgraceful. There seems to be a determination to create an energy wasteland across Norfolk and Suffolk, with no regard for the local impact.*

*“The Waveney Valley is well known for its unspoilt rural tranquillity, historic buildings and rich natural habitats. National Grid have clearly disregarded local views and seem determined to cover the landscape with miles of pylons.*

*“We recognise the need to create a secure and clean energy system, but this can’t come at the unmitigated expense our communities and natural environment.*

*“National Grid have not provided any benefits for local communities or businesses associated with their current plans to upgrade the transmission network. There is no clear plan to upgrade the existing energy infrastructure in Norfolk needed to deliver new homes and jobs. National Grid’s current plans will simply see electricity generated from offshore wind passing through the county with no tangible benefits for Norfolk as a whole.”*

The councils will now look to take up their concerns with National Grid and discuss the issue further.

**Suffolk commits to devolution fast track**

Following an invitation from ministers, Suffolk County Council’s Cabinet today agreed to recommend Suffolk for inclusion in the government’s Devolution Priority Programme (DPP), which would see the creation of a directly elected Mayor (likely covering Suffolk and Norfolk) and the replacement of existing council structures with a streamlined unitary council being set up.

The decision followed a debate and vote at a meeting of all county councillors.

**Speaking following the debate, Councillor Matthew Hicks, Leader of Suffolk County Council, said:**

*“Today marks the start of arguably one of the biggest decisions this council will take in its 50 plus-year history.*

*“We need to think what is best for the people and businesses of Suffolk to whom we have a duty to make the difficult decisions – even if that decision means the end of the council or councils on which we sit.”*

The government’s English Devolution White Paper outlines plans for broader and deeper devolution, coupled with a programme of coordinated local government reorganisation.

Key to these proposals is the restructuring of councils in two-tier areas like Suffolk, shifting from district, borough, and county councils to unitary councils. The government argues that unitary councils can deliver better outcomes for residents and save money that can be reinvested in public services.

Alongside reorganisation, the government is also proposing to create new Mayoral Authorities – with a single directly elected Mayor covering larger geographies (such as Norfolk and Suffolk) and with powers over strategic policy areas like transport infrastructure, health improvement and blue light services.

**Cllr Hicks continued:**

*“Changes of this scale create an opportunity to streamline local government, empower joined-up decision making, save taxpayers money and ensure councils are resistant to economic challenges.*

*“These are not ‘nice to haves’ or ‘aspirations, they are fundamental pillars of the system delivering the best possible public services, with clarity, accountability and delivered in a financially sustainable way.*

*“These are the goals on which we must focus if we are to do the right thing for Suffolk.”*

Suffolk County Council has now written to the government expressing its desire to be at the front of the queue for devolution and local government reorganisation. A decision is expected by the end of the month.

If Suffolk is approved as part of the DPP, more detailed proposals, engagement and Government-led consultation would follow.

**Cllr** **Hicks continued:**

*“To achieve remarkable things and seize significant opportunities, you must be willing to take on potential uncertainties. I want Suffolk to be at the front of the queue, setting the agenda on devolution – not following everyone else when identikit solutions are imposed.*

*“The proposal to join the DPP is not just a step forward; it is a leap towards a brighter, more prosperous future for Suffolk.”*

Papers for the meetings can be viewed at [https://committeeminutes.suffolk.gov.uk](https://committeeminutes.suffolk.gov.uk/)

They are also available to watch back on the council’s YouTube channel: <https://www.youtube.com/user/SuffolkCC>

**Detailed report provides blueprint for changes to Suffolk’s SEND services**

A report has been published that provides the most detailed assessment of need for SEND services in Suffolk and will be used as a blueprint for immediate change.

The forensic 177-page document delves into current arrangements, future anticipated need and looks at gaps and challenges in SEND provision. This assessment highlights the increasing demand for SEND services, the challenges faced by families and professionals, and the importance of improving service provision to ensure equitable outcomes for all.

As a result of this analysis, a series of recommendations have been made to further shape improvements to SEND services. Known as the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Needs Assessment, the report will be discussed at the Health and Wellbeing Board on Thursday 16 January.

Some of the key findings and recommendations in the report include:

* A significant rise in demand for SEND services, with projections suggesting further increases in the coming years
* The importance of early intervention, timely diagnoses, and accessible services to address complex and multiple needs
* Strategic priorities emphasising communication, transition support, and whole system improvements to meet evolving demands.

The report also captures the voices of children and young people, parents, and practitioners to ensure lived experiences inform future strategies. The Suffolk Parent Carer Forum was involved in collating the report.

**Claire Smith, Chair of the Forum, said:**

*“Families' perspectives are essential for predicting the future of SEND in Suffolk and play a crucial role in recognising current and future gaps.*

*“It is vital we prioritise the outcomes for the children and young people of Suffolk.”*

*The report and the recommendations made, will become part of the Local Area Priority Action Plan for widescale SEND reform and improvement. This plan was a requirement following the Ofsted and CQC inspection in November 2023.*

The local area partnership which delivers SEND services is made up of Suffolk County Council, the NHS Suffolk and North East Essex Integrated Care Board (ICB) and NHS Norfolk and Waveney ICB.

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

*“This is a timely report furnishing us with data-rich analysis which will help us make big decisions about the future of SEND provision in Suffolk.*

*“It allows us to see the bigger picture by pulling together all the details around the children and young people who use our services, what support they need and where there may be gaps. It means we can identify priorities and plan our resources better to fulfil those needs.”*

Ten recommendations have been made as a result of this needs assessment. One of those includes addressing delays in assessment, diagnosis and treatment for a wide range of SEND needs. Another recommendation looks at the future planning for the provision of SEND services in Suffolk, noting that the needs and numbers of children and young people with SEND are likely to increase further in the coming years.

Helpful comparisons are also drawn between Suffolk figures, other councils and England averages throughout the report. One of those includes the average spend on each SEND child or young person in Suffolk, which was £155 in 2022/23 (East of England £95 and England £100). Figures also look at the percentage of children and young people assessed and issued with an education, health and care plan for the first time. In Suffolk in 2023 this percentage was 99% of children, compared with 94% across England and 93% with comparable councils.

The report can be found here: [Suffolk SEND Needs Assessment.](https://www.healthysuffolk.org.uk/asset-library/JSNA/Suffolk-SEND-Needs-Assessment.pdf)