October 2026

Parish Report

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Council to 'Explore' Referendum on Housing People Seeking Asylum

At Full Council on 8 October, the Reform UK administration at the council passed a motion to look at holding a Suffolk-wide referendum in May 2027 on housing people seeking asylum in the county. My group, along with Liberal Democrats and Labour councilors in the chamber, spoke out against the idea as divisive and an attack on vulnerable people who had fled to the UK in desperation. The council also has no say in whether people seeking asylum are housed in the county – this is a decision made by the Home Office – so the referendum would be unlikely to make a difference, being more of an opinion poll. The referendum would also be likely to cost between £1 million and £2 million, money which the council can ill afford, given it is predicting an overspend of £7.8million this year, which would take its financial reserves below the threshold considered as safe for councils to operate.

At the same meeting, my group tabled a successful motion in support of the Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI), who in recent months have been subject to abuse online and in person for rescuing migrants in small boats. We were pleased that this gained cross-party support, including from the Reform UK administration, and was passed unanimously.

Best Start Family Hubs and Healthy Babies Programme

On 15 October, the council's Cabinet voted to agree to consult on changes to its early help services provided by Family Hubs (formerly known as children's centres). The council is receiving a grant of £6.5 million from the government for the Best Start Family Hubs and Healthy Babies Programme, which aims to improve life chances for children living in poverty, and requires 70% of family hubs to be sited in the most deprived 30% of each local area. The council has decided to take this opportunity to review the number of hubs in the county, with a view to closing nine of them. The report taken to Cabinet states that outreach work and staff numbers will actually increase, with family hubs services being hosted in libraries or community buildings in some areas, and some family hub buildings that have closed being used for childcare or SEND provision. Closure of the planned family hubs will save the council £425,000 per annum in property-related costs. My group is concerned that the Equality Impact Assessment for the proposals shows that there may be negative impacts for families on a low income, without access to transport, or for whom English is not a first language. Families with multiple young children, or children

who are disabled or have special education needs may also be disadvantaged by the closures. The plans are also dependent on libraries having the space, availability and access to host similar levels of service. These proposed changes come at a time when the council is also proposing cuts to its Healthy Child Service, specifically support for young parents, removal of community staff nurses from health visiting teams, and reduced availability of the school nursing team.

An eight-week public consultation on the Family Hubs proposals is likely to begin soon and last until just before Christmas. The consultation is not yet live, but will be available at this link soon:

https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/consultations-petitions-and-elections/consultations

Scrutiny Update

At Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Committee at the end of September, the committee heard about the high numbers of young people in Suffolk who are Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET). Young people aged 16 and 17 are required to participate in education or training until the age of 18, and currently 89% of 16- and 17-year-olds in the county are participating. The figures show that of Year 12 young people not in education, employment or training, young people in specific cohorts, such as those with mental health needs, those educated at home, those have Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), or are in local authority care, are far more likely not be in education, employment or training. The council plans to refresh its strategy of support for young people, working with partners such as schools and colleges to give early support to young people most at risk of becoming NEET, improve careers education and advice, and improve local access to mental health support for young people.

At Scrutiny Committee on 1 October, the committee voted that it would set up a task and finish group to look into the circumstances around the Section 5A report tabled at Cabinet in September following the executive decision taken by the Leader of the Council to launch legal action against the government in relation to Local Government Reorganisation. The Section 5A report found that the council had twice breached the UK's Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012 in June 2026. Following the work of the task and finish group, the item will likely be tabled at the February 2027 Scrutiny Committee meeting.

Flood Prevention

The winter storm season is just starting and there are a number of things residents can do to lessen the risk of flooding and prepare for heavy rainfall. As climate change brings more frequent periods of intense rainfall, flooding is becoming an increasing risk across the country, as many Suffolk communities experienced during Storm Babet in October 2023. Suffolk County Council is the Lead Local Flood Authority and is seeking funding for and planning projects to reduce the impact of flooding on residents, businesses and critical infrastructure in the county including natural flood management schemes, developed with farmers and landowners, that slow the flow of water through the landscape and reduce flood risk for downstream communities, for example in Debenham which was badly hit by Storm Babet. It is also working in partnership with Norfolk County Council on a Reclaim The Rain project which tests new ways of managing and harnessing water in small rural locations, including projects with Boxford Village Hall and Little Blakenham Village Hall.

There are also practical steps that residents can take themselves, from understanding their flood risk to maintaining watercourses on their land; many residents do not realise they are responsible for a ditch, stream or other watercourse on their property, and that keeping these clear reduces the risk of flooding both for themselves and their neighbours. However, increasingly heavy rainfall can lead to flooding

even where drainage systems and gullies are clear and working. There are some online sources which can help:

- Check the flood risk for a property https://www.gov.uk/check-long-term-flood-risk
- Information on maintenance of ditches and watercourses, where responsibility often lies with the landowner https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/roads-and-transport/flooding-and-drainage/maintenance-of-ditches-and-other-watercourses
- Highways drainage works scheduled https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/roads-and-transport/flooding-and-drainage/highway-drainage
- Flood Smart Living Handbook provides advice and guidance on reducing flood risk https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/asset-library/FINAL-TO-BE-USED-Flood-Smart-Living-November-2024.pdf
- Reporting a flood problem in Suffolk and what happens next https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/roads-and-transport/flooding-and-drainage/report-a-flood-in-suffolk

Fire Service Nominated for Two Awards

Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service has been shortlisted for two awards shortlisted for two national fire awards at the Excellence in Fire & Emergency Awards 2026. The awards, organised by FIRE magazine, celebrate excellence, innovation and dedication across the UK fire and emergency services. The service has been shortlisted in the following categories:

- Emergency Services Collaboration of the Year - Suffolk, Norfolk and Hertfordshire Fire Control Collaboration has been shortlisted for its innovative approach to strengthening resilience, efficiency and emergency response across the three fire and rescue services. The collaboration has ready received national recognition by winning the Outstanding Partnership/Collaboration category at the Fire Resilience Excellence Awards earlier this year
- Claire Watkins from the Fire Service has been shortlisted in the Youth Champion of the Year category for her leadership of Spark, the service's education programme for children and young people. Launched in 2024, Spark works with schools, colleges and community groups to engage with young people about fire safety, road safety, water safety, anti-social behaviour and risk-taking behaviours. Claire was nominated for the award for her commitment to prevention and early intervention, and her success in expanding the Spark programme to reach vulnerable groups and communities identified through local risk data.

The winners will be announced at the Excellence in Fire & Emergency Awards 2026 ceremony on Friday 27 November 2026 in London.

Following the wildfire at Dunwich Heath this summer, the fire service has also seen a record number of volunteer applications for its most recent on-call firefighter recruitment campaign. The service received 219 applications which is more than double the 70 to 100 applications the service would typically receive across all six annual recruitment campaigns combined. This shows the strength of community spirit across Suffolk and a growing awareness of the valuable role on-call firefighters play in keeping local communities safe.

Finally, Suffolk's Chief Fire Officer, Jon Lacey, has recently announced his retirement, bringing to a close a distinguished 34-year career in fire and rescue. Jon joined Suffolk County Council as Chief Fire Officer and Executive Director in November 2021, and during his time in Suffolk has overseen the return of fire

control services to the county, investment in 19 new fire engines and additional emergency response vehicles, continued development of Suffolk's emergency services hubs, and strengthened the governance and improvement work of the service.

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