

December 2025

Parish Report

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Government Consultation on Council Reorganisation

On 19 November, the government launched their consultation on the two proposals submitted for council reorganisation in Suffolk. Suffolk County Council developed and submitted a business case for the government proposing one council for the whole county, and the districts and boroughs submitted a business case proposing three councils, Western Suffolk, Central and Eastern, and Ipswich and Southern Suffolk. The government consultation is different from local consultations you may have filled out recently, and central government will be making the decision on what councils will look like in Suffolk in future.

This consultation is only available until 11 January 2026, a relatively short time for Suffolk residents to express their preferences. You can find the consultation here: <https://consult.communities.gov.uk/local-government-reorganisation/norfolk-suffolk/>

If you want to read through the business cases proposed for the changes, there are links to them on the consultation page above, or they can also be found here:

Three Councils for Suffolk:

<https://threecouncilsforsuffolk.org/wp-content/uploads/Three-Councils-For-Suffolk-Case-for-Change-1.pdf>

One Suffolk:

<https://onesuffolkcouncil.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/HI-RES-WEB-FINAL-LGR-BUSINESS-CASE-Compressed.pdf>

Financial Pressures

On 4 November, Cabinet reviewed the council's financial performance for the first two quarters of the 2025-26 financial year. The council is now predicting an overspend for the year of £20.8m, which it will have to fund using its Risk Reserve. This is an increase of £7.5m compared to the prediction at the end of quarter one. Council financial reserves are forecast to reduce by £37m overall during the year, which is extremely worrying and unsustainable. The Dedicated Schools Grant 'negative reserve', a debt relating to Special Education Needs and Disabilities spend, is likely to be -£72.9m by the end of the year. The government allows local authorities to hold this debt via a 'statutory override' which is due to expire in March 2028. If the provision for this expires, it is likely that many councils in the country – not just Suffolk County Council - would be unable to balance their budgets. As well as SEND, overspends at the council are mostly in adult and children's social care.

Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects

At Cabinet on 4 November, it was agreed that the council would object to the Nation Grid's proposed Norwich to Tilbury grid reinforcement, which would see pylons and overhead electricity lines bisecting the county. Some undergrounding is planned in the Dedham Vale National Landscape area, with the council pressing for undergrounding in the Waveney valley too, and more generally objecting on the basis that offshore alternatives had not been fully explored, and that the grid reinforcement might not be necessary in the timescale asserted by National Grid Electricity Transmission. The council is also concerned about the impacts of the project and its construction on the environment and residents of Suffolk, and the possibility that the new lines might lead to an increased number of solar farm applications and energy projects along the route which would have a cumulative effect on the local area.

The council is also objecting to the Sea Link project, whereby cables would make landfall between Aldeburgh and Thorpeness, with a new substation and energy infrastructure built at Friston near Saxmundham. The grounds for objection include inadequate road access, impact of the scheme on the local landscape and the proposals for a new bridge being 'disproportionate' and damaging to the environment and local heritage including Grade II listed buildings nearby.

Planning for Emergencies

At Scrutiny Committee on 20 November, the council's business continuity arrangements were reviewed. Business continuity refers to how the council ensures it is able to continue providing essential services in situations of emergency, for example power outages, flooding, or pandemic illness like Covid 19. Members of the Joint Emergency Planning Unit joined the meeting to explain that all directorates at the council held plans for possible scenarios and incidents, with directors providing oversight and teams in each directorate reviewing and updating the plans as necessary. The council can also set up an Emergency Control Centre to respond to incidents and coordinate if multiple council directorates are affected. The council undertakes planned exercises to assess how its plans would work, and reviews processes after each incident or exercise to improve them. It also takes part in regional exercises, and uses a Home Office recording and planning system, Resilience Direct, to respond to emergencies, which means that it is not reliant on council IT systems in case of a cyberattack. Paper copies of all plans are kept in case of power outages.

New Project Celebrating Disability

Suffolk Archives has received a grant of £139,107 from the National Lottery Heritage Fund to deliver a new project called Beyond Labels: Celebrating Disability which aims to shine a light on the lives achievements and challenges of people with disabilities in Suffolk. Beyond Labels will collect and preserve personal stories - as well as the histories of organisations, schools, and charities that support disabled people - to create a record that celebrates disability while sparking conversations about inclusion, accessibility, and equality.

As part of the project, Suffolk Archives will work with local schools and community groups to offer free workshops that teach skills in recording, organising, and preserving archives. There will also be workshops around the county that provide opportunities for participants to co-create projects that amplify disabled voices and educate others about the challenges faced in daily life. The project will also include cataloguing and selective digitisation of existing disability-related records, making them more accessible to the public and ensuring that Suffolk Archives reflects the diversity of the county. There will be a free public exhibition at The Hold in Ipswich which will run from February to May 2026 to celebrate the stories collected through the project and encourage greater awareness and empathy across Suffolk.
