September 2026

Parish Report

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Council predicts £7.8m overspend this year

At Cabinet on 17 September, the most recent financial forecasts for the council were discussed, based on the outturn for quarter one of 2026-27. The council is currently predicting that it will overspend by £7.8m by 31 March 2027, and the overspend will need to be funded by the council withdrawing money from its risk reserve. The council is required to hold 5% of its annual revenue budget in unallocated reserves in order to be considered financially resilient, and the £7.8m drawdown means that the unallocated reserves would be £3.7m short of this 5% figure, at 4.6%. If this happens, the council will need to write to the government to inform them. The overspend at the council is in a number of areas, mostly in adult social care (care purchasing), children in care, inclusion (Special Education Needs and Disabilities or SEND), and home to school transport for pupils with SEND. The council needs to save as much money as it can between now and the end of the year to reduce the amount it will take out of its reserves.

The council's Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) deficit, which funds education, is predicted to increase by £104.8m by the end of the year, mostly the high needs block which funds SEND education. The government has a statutory override in place for this debt until 31 March 2028, after which date the government is due to take over funding SEND provision from local authorities. The council also expects the government to write off £147.5m of this debt this autumn via High Needs Stability funding. However, the rate at which this debt continues to grow means that the council will still owe many millions to the government by March 2028, as even after the £147.5m is taken off the debt, the council is still predicting a deficit of £121.2m by March 2027. The council will be hoping that the government will provide more funding or write off more of this debt.

Update on Local Government Reorganisation

On 7 September, the government announced that it was withdrawing plans for Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) in a number of areas including Suffolk. This means that the plans for three unitary councils for Suffolk are currently off the table and subject to a government review. The announcement follows decisions by several councils, including Suffolk, to mount legal challenges to the government

over LGR decision-making. This means that there will no longer be elections to the unitary councils in May 2027, with the elections for districts and Ipswich Borough going ahead as they would have normally. At the moment, the mayoral election for the new mayoral authority for Norfolk and Suffolk is also due to go ahead, with the government announcing no changes to this programme. Councils in Suffolk will need to wait to hear from the government on the outcome of its LGR proposals review, there is currently no confirmation on when this will be completed.

Legal breaches at the council (Section 5A Report)

At Cabinet on 17 September, the council's legal breaches over the LGR challenge to the government were discussed, with the council maintaining that the breaches were 'minor and inadvertent'. The council was in breach of the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012 in two respects in June, when the Leader of the Council made an executive decision to lodge a legal challenge against the government:

- When an executive decision is made, it should be published as soon as 'reasonably practicable'. In this case, the decision was made on 18 June but not published until 26 June. This meant councillors were not aware of the decision in time to formally challenge it (decisions have to be 'called in' for scrutiny by 4pm on the second working day after the decision was made). This meant the Leader's decision was effectively made behind closed doors and could not be challenged as per the council's constitution
- When a member of the council's Scrutiny Committee requested information about the executive decision, they should have received the judicial review information within 10 days of their request, but this deadline was not met

The Cabinet decided that additional training on these processes would be a suitable measure to prevent future breaches. Section 5A reports are very rare and a serious matter for councils, as they are only produced when a council has admitted maladministration or breached the law.

A14 and Transport Resilience

The case for an Ipswich northern route or an alternative crossing over the River Orwell was also discussed at Cabinet on 17 September, with the council agreeing to pay consultants £300k to look again at the options for improving traffic in Ipswich when the Orwell Bridge is closed. The council last looked at options for this a few years ago, with plans for an Ipswich Northern Route scrapped by 2020 due to opposition from the communities where the routes were proposed, and the lack of funding. It is likely that any major infrastructure options, such a northern bypass, tunnel or second bridge, would cost between £500m to over £1bn. The A14 is a trunk road and the responsibility of National Highways rather than the council, and any major project would need government funding as the council would not be able to afford it. This funding is not guaranteed to become available. The Cabinet report also noted the importance of improving rail routes for the port, such as the long-promised works on junctions at Ely and Haughley. Improving the Ely junction would enable an additional 2,900 rail freight journeys, meaning 98,000 fewer lorry journeys for the port. Fewer lorries on the A14 would be benefit communities all along the length of the A14 which suffer excess traffic when the road is closed.

Impact of Better Recycling

My group met recently with officers from the council dealing with waste, who provided us with some data on Better Recycling and how the roll out of waste collection changes had been going in the county

since June. While household waste and recycling are collected by district and borough councils, Suffolk County Council is then responsible for processing the waste. Residual waste, which is waste that cannot be used for something else, dropped from 4,077 tonnes per week in April/May to 3,225 tonnes per week since June. Mostly this is due to food waste being collected separately and processed in anaerobic digestors. Over a year, that would be equate to a reduction of over 40,000 tonnes for all of Suffolk. Due to the engagement work and publicity undertaken by councils about the changes, an increased amount of glass, plastics and cartons are also now being collected since June.

Funding for the Fire Service

The wildfires occurring across the county this summer due to dry weather and extreme heat have highlighted shortfalls in the equipment needed by Suffolk Fire and Rescue. The current budget for equipping fire and rescue workers covers replacing the standard equipment they use, but wildfires such have the one at Dunwich Heath require different and specialist equipment for the fire service to fight them safely and effectively, including off-road fleet for areas their existing vehicles cannot access, clothing and personal equipment (PPE) for firefighters that can protect them for prolonged incidents, and boots with better grip for outdoor terrain. The fire service is still calculating the cost and preparing a debrief on the Dunwich Heath fire, this may mean they require more investment to be adequately prepared for future wildfires, given the hot summers are likely to continue or worsen. It is also possible that they may need more investment for equipment used in flooding incidents, as these are also likely to increase in number and severity. The Fire Brigades Union in Suffolk has written to the government to request increased funding for fire services across the country to deal with the new dangers they are facing.

Care Leavers Winter Ball

Suffolk County Council acts as a 'Corporate Parent' to the children and young people who are taken into its care, and as many young people in care miss out on events like their school prom, the council is holding a Winter Ball for its care leavers on 27 November during National Care Leavers Month. The council is requesting donations of prom dresses, suits/formalwear, shoes and accessories and financial contributions towards the evening, and the Leaving Care service have set up a Go Fund Me so residents and businesses can donate. Donations of clothing, shoes and accessories can be dropped off at the Info Bar, Constantine House, Ipswich, IP1 2DX.

The link to the Go Fund Me site for the event is here: https://gofund.me/71c92855d

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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

Green Party

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