

Appendix C – County Cllr. Penny Otton’s Report to Full Council –

- 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/preparing-for-flooding>
- Flood recovery advice and support: <http://www.suffolk.gov.uk/about/flood-recovery-information-for-suffolk>
- EXTRAORDINARY FULL COUNCIL MEETING - A special meeting of the full council is to be held on 9th January specifically to discuss the Devolution proposals. Although a vote will be taken the decision will be made at the Cabinet meeting following at 5.30 by the Leader and his cabinet colleagues from the Conservative administration. New unitary with a population over 500,000 councils could be formed and a directly elected mayor. A decision whether to postpone the SCC elections will be made by the government minister.
- Motions Passed at Council - At Council on Thursday 12 December, three motions were passed more or less unanimously by councillors. The first was a Conservative motion opposing government’s changes to Agricultural Property Relief, which mean that from April 2026, Suffolk farmers will only have relief from inheritance tax for up to £1m of combined agricultural and business property. The Conservative motion also opposed industrialization of the countryside by major energy projects, including solar farms. The motion brought by my group also related to solar farms, specifically the need to prioritise rooftop solar over solar farms and lobby for changes to planning so that new housing and commercial developments have solar panels, and priority is given to retrofitting solar to buildings or brownfield sites over new solar farms which take good quality farmland out of food production. For example, in France solar panels are often mounted on canopies above car parks to maximise space. As well as contributing to the country’s net zero targets, solar panels could significantly reduce energy bills for Suffolk schools and libraries. The final motion was tabled by the Conservatives on knife crime and proposed that a knife crime action plan for Ipswich be discussed at the next meeting of the Safer, Stronger Communities Board in March 2025.
- Suffolk Economic Strategy - At Cabinet on Tuesday 3 December, a new economic strategy was tabled which followed the creation of the Suffolk Business Board earlier in 2024. The Board produced a strategy for the county for the next five years, listing the areas which are most important to the Suffolk economy, including clean energy, agriculture, tourism, and ports and logistics. It also outlined how the Board hopes that digital innovation, AI and robotics can help drive improvements and growth in these areas, along with plans to support start-ups, provide business mentoring and skills projects with young people, for example. We also expressed concern that the strategy barely mentioned arts, heritage and culture, and that no arts or cultural organizations were represented on the Board. The plan was approved by the council’s Cabinet, and the Suffolk Business Board will now finalise how it plans to deliver the strategy, and will report back to Cabinet every year on their progress.
- Children’s Services Improvement Plans - The Education and Children’s Services Scrutiny Committee met on 5 December to review the plan for improvement following the Ofsted inspection of the council’s children’s social care provision earlier in the year. The Ofsted report was published in August 2024 and the council learned it had dropped two grades, from being

rated Outstanding in 2019 its current grade of Requires Improvement. The council had to produce an action plan for improvement which it has submitted to Ofsted and the Department for Education. councils. There will also be a new Strengthening Services for Children and Families Board, which will chaired by the council's Chief Executive, Nicola Beach. The council particularly needs to improve services for care leavers and consistency of practice and quality assurance - this means reviewing interactions with children and families to make sure the council is doing the best it can to help them. This work is separate to the council's improvement work for Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), which is subject to a separate inspection process by Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC).

- Devolution and Council Reorganization - Following the new government's shelving of the previous devolution deal for Suffolk, the Government has published a white paper outlining the approach they wish to see in reforming local government, including the abolition of district councils. Elected mayors and large (500,000) unitary authorities are the goal for the largest local government reform since 1972, when the two (three including parish councils) tier local governance structure was introduced. While there are obvious benefits to having a 'one stop shop' for all things local government, if this is to be introduced without losing the 'local' from local government the minimum resident number needs to be more flexible. With the recommended figure in the paper being a minimum 500,000 residents per council, this means only one council for the whole of Suffolk (760,000 residents) would fit this requirement.
- We will know more about how this reorganization will happen over the coming months.

Appendix D - District Cllrs' Report to Full Council – Cllrs. David Bradbury & Harry Richardson

Report from Cllr. Bradbury

- Council meeting - There was no scheduled council meeting in December. The next meeting will be held on 23rd January 2025.
- Budget updates - Proposals for the General Fund budget were approved in this month's second cabinet meeting, and discussed later on in the Overview & Scrutiny committee on the 19th December. This shows the council's finances to be surplus, unusual for District councils, in part due to expanded housing developments and income generated from Gateway 14, with these surplus funds being used to proceed with the Mid Suffolk Plan. Key figures include an increase of £1.689m in net revenue service expenditure, a £2.660m increase in gross expenditure, no increase in council tax from 2024/25, and a capital budget of £29.986m in 2025/26.
- CIL Expenditure updates - New updates regarding the Community Infrastructure Levy programme were discussed in the first cabinet meeting of this month. This includes approval of half a million pounds of investment into the Stowmarket Health Education and Leisure Facilities (SHELF), and £188k of funding for Thurston Community College.
- Devolution White Paper - The White Paper regarding devolution has now been published, which despite not mentioning Suffolk directly, it strongly suggests at a change to the two-tier local government structure. This could potentially suggest a large Unitary Authority covering all of Suffolk, abolishing the district councils altogether. The paper also includes the use of introducing a "Strategic Authority", which is likely to include a Mayor for both Suffolk & Norfolk.
- National Planning Policy Framework - Changes have been made to the National Planning Policy Framework to assist with the government's housebuilding plans. This includes mandatory housebuilding targets for councils, with a priority on brownfield sites. The new plans have sparked both praise and backlash, with concerns over the role of individual councils. Mid Suffolk's portfolio holder for Heritage, Planning and Infrastructure Cllr Andrew Stringer has

commented on the new proposals. [Statement in response to Government's National Planning Policy Framework announcement - Mid Suffolk District Council - babergh.gov.uk / midsuffolk.gov.uk](https://www.babergh.gov.uk/midsuffolk.gov.uk)

Report from Cllr. Richardson

- Local government reform - Following the publication of the government's devolution white paper in December, Suffolk County Council are now meeting on Thursday 9th January to decide whether to submit an expression of interest to join the government's 'Devolution Priority Programme'. The Conservative Group, who hold a majority on the Council, are supportive of this position and so this is likely to go ahead. The submission deadline is Friday 10th January, and the government is expected to make a decision in mid-February on whether to approve applications for the priority programme. Those that are approved will see County Council elections postponed from May 2025, with elections to the new unitary authorities in May 2026.
For Suffolk, there are three main options being considered, in descending order of likelihood: a single, Suffolk-wide authority; two Suffolk-wide authorities (East and West); and one urban authority concentrated in and around Ipswich, with another covering the remainder of the county. The third is the least likely to materialise as Ipswich's wider population, i.e. including Kesgrave, is smaller (~circa 180k) than the government's intended minimum of 500k for a unitary authority. For context, the total population of Suffolk is approximately 768k as of the 2021 census, so either of the first two options are plausible. In either scenario, and if the plans do proceed, then Mid Suffolk District Council would be abolished in May 2026 and its statutory responsibilities transferred to the new unitary authority.
- Thurston station upgrades - At MSDC's Cabinet meeting in December, Network Rail were awarded £6k to progress the steps of the Thurston rail improvements and level crossing project. This will allow them to complete the pre-ES3 stage works, and to develop a cost and programme for the ES3 phase which will confirm the final option chosen of a suitable crossing at this Station. Although this is only a relatively small sum of money, it is a necessary part to progress to ES3 stage.
- Skills & Innovation Centre - Planning permission has been granted for MSDC's Skills and Innovation Centre at the Gateway 14 site in Stowmarket. This will be a three-storey, 35,000 sq. ft facility and will include office space for high growth start-ups, collaboration and innovation spaces, training and meeting rooms, and a café. Freeport East agreed £16.6m funding for the centre earlier this year, with Mid Suffolk District Council meeting the remaining cost of £2.4m.
- Suffolk Economic Strategy - The Suffolk Public Sector Leaders Group, which includes Mid Suffolk District Council, has endorsed a Suffolk Economy Strategy. The strategy was developed by the Suffolk Business Board through extensive collaboration and consultation with key stakeholders and aims to build a thriving, inclusive, and sustainable economy that supports local communities and contributes to the national economy. It is also designed to leverage Suffolk's strengths in clean energy, agri-food, and logistics, integrating these core sectors with emerging opportunities in technology and innovation. The hope is to establish Suffolk as an epicentre of clean technology convergence, supporting robust economic growth while ensuring that every resident can benefit

January Briefing Note for town and parish councils – from Babergh & Mid Suffolk District Councils

[Leader's response to Devolution White Paper](#) - Leader of Mid Suffolk District Council, Cllr Andy Mellen said: "I remain open-minded about reorganisation as long as it is done in the right way and has the interests of our residents at its heart.

[Statement in response to Government's National Planning Policy Framework announcement](#) - Statement from Cllr Andrew Stringer, Mid Suffolk's portfolio holder for Heritage, Planning and Infrastructure, following today's announcement about the National Planning Policy Framework.

[Council tax freeze proposed in Mid Suffolk](#) - Mid Suffolk District Council proposes to freeze its element of council tax for the upcoming financial year – helping residents to navigate the cost-of-living crisis while continuing investment in priority areas to improve quality of life in the district.

[Full speed ahead for £18m Skills and Innovation Centre](#) - Mid Suffolk District Council's plans for an £18m Skills and Innovation Centre in Stowmarket have taken a major step forward.

[Mid Suffolk communities set to receive almost £700k in cash boost from developers](#) - Three projects in Mid Suffolk are set to receive a share of £691k from Mid Suffolk District Council, with money collected from developers set to fund new sports facilities, the expansion of a college and keep long-awaited rail improvements on track.

[Suffolk Public Sector Leaders Group endorse the Suffolk Economy Strategy](#) - New strategy aims to propel Suffolk's economic growth and position the county at the forefront of the UK's green evolution

[Ready, steady, grow! - £0.5m boost for sports and wellbeing proposed for Stowmarket](#) - Stowmarket could be about to receive almost £500,000 from developer contributions towards new sports and healthy activity facilities in the town.

[Funding from Mid Suffolk District Council](#) - Do you want to know more about the funding opportunities available from Mid Suffolk District Council? Visit our new-look webpage which has all the information you need, including a breakdown of our grants, what they are for, and how you can apply. This includes our new Community Development Grants, and our Pride in Your Place grants. For more details, [visit the website](#).

Financial support



Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)

CIL is funding, generated by new developments, which local organisations can apply for and use to make capital improvements to community facilities.

Suitable for

Charities and organisations such as village halls, parish councils, sports clubs

What's available

Up to £100,000 can be applied for (up to a maximum of 75% of project costs)

When to apply

Bids can be submitted in May and October each year

[Find out more about CIL](#)



Section 106 (S106)

S106 is funding, generated by development, which can be applied for and used toward making capital improvements or repairs to community facilities.

Suitable for

Charities and organisations such as village halls, voluntary and community groups, parish councils, sports clubs

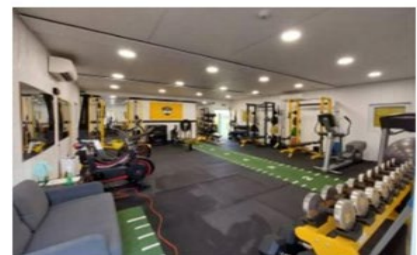
What's available

This will depend on the parish where your project is taking place

When to apply

Open for applications

[Find out more](#)



Community Development Grants

Community Development Grants are available to organisations seeking support towards revenue, capital or pre-project costs or activities

Suitable for

Charities and organisations such as village halls, voluntary and community groups, parish councils, sports clubs

What's available

Up to £20,000 can be applied for

When to apply

Open for applications until 26th January 2025

[Find out more about Community Development Grants](#)

