

A Report from James Finch for Leavenheath Parish Council Meeting 4th March 2026

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➤ **One Suffolk plan revealed saving Suffolk £39.4 million a year with more local services with Local Government Re-organisation.**

Millions of pounds of public money would be saved and reinvested in frontline services and benefits for the whole of Suffolk, if the Government backs a new plan published today (Monday 8 September).

The ambitious proposal will see all of Suffolk's six councils abolished and replaced with one new unitary council - which would deliver both local and county-wide services.

The One Suffolk business case demonstrates that a single unitary for Suffolk will save £78.2 million after the first five years, while three councils would cost an eye-watering £145.3 million more than the current two-tier system. After the first five years, one council would save £39.4 million a year, whereas three would cost £13.1 million more than the current model. The business case is built on rigorous financial analysis of Suffolk-based data conducted by global advisory firm Grant Thornton, rather than generic national modelling.

One Suffolk would have the capacity to create real improvements to council services which would benefit everyone, including:

- Improved financial resilience, enabling the unitary council to free up resources for frontline services and keep council tax as low as possible.
- Harmonising Council Tax to the lowest level across Suffolk. Based on current levels this would result in Band D properties seeing a reduction of £245 in Ipswich, £17 in East Suffolk, £29 in West Suffolk, £19 in Babergh and a freeze in Mid Suffolk.
- A new deal for market towns, including Ipswich, backed by a £40m capital investment fund, and a review of car parking charges and markets conducted in consultation with traders, businesses and representative bodies.
- *Empowering communities by offering powers and funding to town and parish councils where these councils express a desire for additional responsibilities. Creating a new town council for Ipswich to enhance democratic representation.*
- A proactive and revitalised highways service that says 'yes' more - acting swiftly, communicating clearly and delivering more.
- *Creating a unified planning framework that delivers greater consistency, efficiency, and strategic alignment across Suffolk, paired with local planning committees so decisions are made close to home.*
- Leveraging technology and innovation to create a modern council prepared for future challenges.
- Building a strong, flourishing, and resilient local economy that serves all residents, businesses, and communities.
- A stronger voice for Suffolk through effective collaboration with the new mayor, focusing on clear investment priorities that maximise benefits.

The One Suffolk campaign engaged communities from across Suffolk, with 8,189 responses to our Residents' Survey. This made it the largest survey response rate for the county council in the past decade.

Immediately after a Full Council meeting, the Council's Cabinet approved the One Suffolk Business Plan on 16 September and submitted it to Government on 26 September. Government Ministers will be then deciding later this year which proposals to put out to public consultation, before making their final decision in early 2026 - ?? March 2026..

This is the Business Case – Executive summary and the full report.: [One Suffolk Business Case](#)

➤ **Council sets out plans for 2026/27 budget**

The £850 million plan aims to safeguard frontline services, support the most vulnerable, and invest in Suffolk's future – despite rising costs, growing demand and shortfalls in national funding. Key themes of the draft budget include:

- **Savings and efficiencies: £46.5 million** of savings through service transformation and efficiencies, including a temporary reduction in employer pension contributions, made possible by the strong position of the council's pension fund.
- Rising financial pressures: Increasing demand, **in particular for adult and children's social care, will add £32.2 million in costs**, alongside continued pressures from the Dedicated Schools Grant deficit.
- **Reserves: A one-off use of reserves will bridge a £5.9 million funding gap**, while keeping reserves above the minimum level needed to manage financial risks.

- **Capital investment:** The capital programme has been shortened from four years to three ahead of local government reorganisation in 2028. It continues to fund essential projects like school expansions and infrastructure upgrades, as well as new schemes, such as improvements to bus services, public rights of way, and cycling and walking infrastructure.

Our priorities are clear: protect frontline services, invest where it will make the most impact, and make the decisions needed to keep Suffolk strong, resilient and ready for the future.

To support these plans, the council has proposed a 4.99% rise in Council Tax, comprising a 2.99% general increase and an extra 2% for adult care. Alongside a forecast 1% rise in the taxbase, this would generate an additional £27.4 million.

For households, this would mean:

- **Band B property:** £25.90 per week, an increase of £1.23 a week
(Band B properties are the most common in Suffolk)
- **Band D property: £33.30 per week, an increase of £1.58 a week.**

We have proposed a Council Tax increase as part of this budget, and that proposal was debated on 12th February. It is important to be clear that the government's provisional finance settlement assumes that councils will raise Council Tax by the maximum permitted each year, leaving local authorities with limited options if essential services are to be maintained. ***The final budget was agreed by all county councillors at a Full Council meeting on Thursday 12 February 2026.***

Young people's voices shape Suffolk's 2025 Annual Public Health Report

The event brought together partners from across the public, voluntary and community sectors to listen to young people who were involved in creating the report, using hackathon events to explore what matters most in their communities. Attendees discussed how youth social action improves physical and mental health, with potential to address health inequalities across Suffolk.

➤ **Department for Education (DfE) acknowledges progress - and sets clear expectations for Suffolk's SEND improvement**

In a recent stocktake visit, officers from the DfE reported progress in governance, quality assurance and timeliness, leadership and multi-agency working. They praised a shared commitment to improving outcomes for children and young people with SEND and laid out a number of recommendations for further improvement.

SEND services in Suffolk are delivered in partnership by Suffolk County Council, the NHS Suffolk and North East Essex Integrated Care Board (ICB) and NHS Norfolk and Waveney ICB, the Suffolk Parent Carer Forum and education settings.

The findings of the stocktake visit have been published in a letter addressed to Sarah-Jane Smedmor, Executive Director of Children & Young People's Services at Suffolk County Council, and Dr Ed Garratt OBE, Chief Executive Suffolk and North East Essex Integrated Care Board. You can read the letter here:-

[Inspections and evaluations - Suffolk SEND Local Offer](#)

The DfE acknowledged work to clear the backlog of Education Health and Care Plans (EHCP) by January and the fact that plans will be delivered above the national average for timeliness. Officers noted a need to ensure that plans reflect families' views and lead to timely, appropriate support.

The next review of SEND services by the DfE is scheduled for the end of the spring term.

➤ **County Council has approved much-needed provision for children with complex needs**

Papers published in January set out plans for the new provision, which will provide purpose-built Ofsted-registered accommodation, improving outcomes for children and reducing reliance on high-cost, private placements. Following a successful bid, £1.4m of Department for Education funding has been secured for the project, which will be match-funded with a further £1.4m from Suffolk County Council.

Nationally, councils are facing growing demand and increasing complexity of need. Suffolk is facing the same pressures, with more children coming into care, and children entering care later with lived experiences meaning that they often require more specialist care and support at higher costs. A lack of choice in the current care market means there is a critical need for Suffolk based, Ofsted-registered placements for children with complex needs.

Suffolk County Council has approved plans by Unity Schools Partnership, a trust that runs 40 schools across Suffolk, Norfolk, Essex and Cambridgeshire, to open the 126-place school on the site of the former Saxmundham SET School in Seaman Avenue, Saxmundham.

➤ **Nationally significant Anglo-Saxon burial ground found at Sizewell C site**

- **Ancient graves of two high-status individuals found with weapons and personal items**
- **Discovery sheds fascinating new light on Suffolk society in the 7th century**
- **Remarkable archaeological find to feature on BBC Two's and I Player "Digging for Britain"**

Among the most remarkable discoveries is a high-status grave containing two individuals buried alongside a fully harnessed horse, weapons, and personal items. These finds, dating to the 7th century, suggest the individuals were elite members of Anglo-Saxon society and reflect their complex burial traditions.

The team from Oxford Cotswold Archaeology (OCA), working on behalf of Sizewell C, identified at least 11 burial mounds, known as barrows, along with cremation and inhumation burials. All had been carefully arranged across a prominent point in the landscape near Theberton in Suffolk.

Despite poor bone preservation caused by the local sandy soils, detailed excavation and recording have preserved valuable information about burial practices and social status in early Medieval Suffolk.

➤ **Norwich to Tilbury pylon scheme is 'un-coordinated decimation of our county'**

The first Open Floor Hearing took place Tuesday 10 February in Ipswich, as an opportunity for interested parties to present their views in person to the Examination panel.

Councillor Richard Rout spoke on behalf of Suffolk County Council, citing a number of long-standing and unresolved objections as to why the council believes the current project proposal should not go ahead. These include:

- The lack of alternative proposals provided by National Grid
- Insufficient clarity on the need for a connection date of 2031
- Concern over working hours to include weekends and bank holidays
- Extensive tree loss and environmental impacts
- The need to protect and enhance the Dedham Vale national landscape
- The need for compensation measures in the Waveney Valley
- Higher quality and more robust outline management plans

"The county council fully supports the need to resolve the country's energy security. But not like this. The ill-considered, un-coordinated decimation of our county by nationally significant infrastructure projects like Norwich to Tilbury, simply cannot continue."

➤ **Adam Buxton shines a light on the need for more Foster Carers in a new documentary**

Adam Buxton said: "I didn't really know very much about fostering before I spent time with Gary, Shannon and Catherine. We've got 3 children and a dog at home, and the thought of adding another child or more children into our family life blows my mind. What they do, for kids who haven't asked to be brought into care, amazes me. And Shannon's reflections as a young person who has helped her parents to foster were just incredible. I'm full of admiration and respect for them and their families."

Gary, a former logistics manager and now factory worker, his wife and two daughters have been fostering for Suffolk County Council for 12 years. They usually foster children in the short term and have also looked after a young girl with disabilities for a longer time. In response to *Adam asking him why they foster, Gary gets emotional and replies tearfully that they do it to give children a childhood.*

Catherine, a library book scheme co-ordinator, her husband Sean and their two children have been fostering with Norfolk County Council for six years. They originally planned to foster on a short-term basis but have become long-term foster parents instead. Among Top Trumps and Minecraft sword repairs, *Adam asks Catherine why they foster. She gestures around the lounge and replies that they're giving a child a chance.*

The 19-minute documentary can be viewed on the Foster East Youtube channel, below:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M6uiWmxiCRU&embeds_referring_euri=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.suffolk.gov.uk%2F&source_ve_path=OTY3MTQ

Fostering is a flexible role with options for short term care from a weekend a month to longer term opportunities, all providing life-changing support for local children. If you want to find out more about what it's like to foster or adopt with us, please call a member of the team on **01473 264800**

➤ **My Priorities**

Education - Supporting Vulnerable People - Jobs and Growth - Localism and the Stour Valley - Building on Suffolk's Strength all underpinned by strong financial management and fair council tax.

