

County Council report July 2023

Suffolk Fire Service to bring control room back to the County

Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service has announced plans to create a new fire control centre here in Suffolk.

Since October 2011, Suffolk has shared a control room with Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Fire and Rescue Service in Huntingdon. The joint project has worked well, saving both fire services money and enabling greater cross-border resource sharing.

However, the company behind a project to deliver a new IT system, initiated in 2019, has run into technical and financial problems, causing a significant delay. This, in addition to advancements in technology, has led to the decision to bring fire control back into the county by the end of 2024.

The proposed new control centre will be brought to Suffolk County Council's Cabinet for approval in September 2023.

Help for Suffolk Pre-payment Meter customers

A package of support has been created for pre-payment meter customers in Suffolk who are struggling with their energy bills.

Warm Homes Suffolk is a Suffolk-wide Council partnership service, delivering energy efficiency support to low-income households affected by cost-of-living pressures.

Supported by Suffolk's Collaborative Communities Board and funding from Public Health Suffolk's Contain Outbreak Management Fund (COMF), the service is now able to offer specific help for households struggling to pay their energy bills via a pre-payment meter, in addition to its existing support.

The support covers the whole of Suffolk and is available for all residents, whether they are in social housing, council tenants, owner occupiers or private renters.

The Warm Homes Suffolk Service can check eligibility and support applications for grants to increase household energy efficiency, with measures such as loft and wall insulation to air source heat pumps, draught-proofing and more.

It is estimated that more than 24,000 people in Suffolk are pre-payment meter customers.

The service will work with everyone to understand the pressures on their finances and the impact this is having on their lives. The service can carry out a home visit, as well as providing advice over the phone and by email.

The COMF funding of £180,000 will enable this project to run for 12 months to provide the following:

- Income maximisation (through grants and benefits)
- Budgeting advice
- Help understanding bills and heating systems
- Support to reduce energy expenditure (By promoting social tariffs and support to switch suppliers)
- Improving household energy efficiency (By installing insulation, draught proofing, heating systems and solar panels)
- Facilitating switch away from prepaid meters if appropriate

Pre-payment meter customers who would like support can contact prepay@eastsoffolk.gov.uk to find out more, or call: **Prepay West at 07769 365796**, or **Prepay East at 07769 366229**.

Referrals can be made directly from households, the voluntary sector and professionals to find prepay households who can benefit from an independent look at their bills.

Warm Homes Suffolk also offers support and advice for residents who are not pre-payment meter customers. To find out more about the support on offer, visit: <https://www.warmhomessuffolk.org/>

[Ancestry appointed to digitise Suffolk's popular family and local history sources](#)

More than 400 years of fascinating historical documents held at Suffolk Archives are to be digitised and made available online, thanks to an agreement between Suffolk County Council and Ancestry.

Suffolk Archives will work alongside the family history website Ancestry to create high-quality, full-colour digital images of millions of baptisms, marriage and burial records from parishes within the Diocese of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich.

The earliest records being digitised date back to 1538 and include events in the lives of notable historical figures, such as the 1776 baptism of landscape artist John Constable, and the 1846 burial of Thomas Clarkson who devoted his life to the abolition of slavery.

It is hoped that Suffolk's main parish records will be published online in early 2025 with other collections of local interest to follow. Public access will be free of charge in Suffolk

Archives branches or at any Suffolk Library. Anyone with an Ancestry subscription will also be able to access the records as part of their research from their own computer or device.

Further details about the project can be found on the [Suffolk Archives website](#).

£100m broadband investment in Suffolk under government's Project Gigabit

Better broadband is on its way for around 80,000 properties across rural Suffolk in a £100 million investment under a £5 billion government infrastructure programme.

The county is one of three to benefit from Project Gigabit and was chosen to host the launch of the announcement by Minister for Data and Digital Infrastructure, Sir John Whittingdale.

Similar projects were also announced for Norfolk and Hampshire as Sir John was joined in Orford by Suffolk Coastal MP Therese Coffey and Councillor Matthew Hicks, the leader of Suffolk County Council.

Project Gigabit is the government's £5 billion mission to roll out gigabit-capable, reliable broadband across the UK.

Improved connectivity unlocks new opportunities and fuels innovation, supporting the Prime Minister's priority of growing the economy by creating better paid jobs.

Around 62,000 homes and businesses in Norfolk stand to benefit from £114 million of Project Gigabit investment, across locations including Buxton, Castle Acre and Horning.

A further 8,000 premises in the northwest of the county are being reviewed for inclusion subject to survey in the next six months.

This project is managed by BDUK who in turn have contracted CityFibre to do the actual work of installing the cabling.

CityFibre, the UK's largest independent full-fibre provider, will deliver gigabit-capable infrastructure for around 218,000 homes and businesses having secured £318 million of Project Gigabit funding after a competitive process. The provider will also be making a private investment of £170 million to deliver the project.

Decisions on where broadband infrastructure is installed will be made by BDUK and not by SCC.

Survey work in all three counties commences immediately, with the first installations in the New Year and the first live connections expected by summer 2024.

Once connected, residents and businesses will enjoy access to broadband services over a network capable of supporting speeds of up to 10Gbps.

Council to consider new chapter for library services

Suffolk County Council's Cabinet is set to discuss the future of library services in Suffolk at its next meeting on 11 July.

The current contract with Suffolk's Libraries Industrial and Provident Society (IPS), worth £5.92 million per annum, ends on 31st July 2024. The Council now needs to consider how library services will be delivered following the expiry of the contract.

The report to Cabinet will recommend that a new Library Service contract is procured using a competitive tender process.

To enable meaningful engagement, public consultation, and a competitive tender process to take place, the report also recommends that the current contract with Suffolk's Libraries IPS is extended by 10 months, to 31 May 2025.

The public consultation will be used to inform the requirements and future development of the new service.

In May 2023, Suffolk County Council's Cabinet agreed to protect library services by providing Suffolk's Libraries IPS an additional £720k per year to address increases in service costs, until the end of the current contract. The proposal to be put to cabinet on 11 July is to continue to fund Suffolk Libraries IPS at this rate for the duration of the proposed 10-month extension.

The proposed value of the new contract will be £6.842m per year, considering the increased service costs and including an additional £0.2m for the Libraries Outreach Service. The proposed term of the contract will be 6 years, with the option to extend for a further 6 years.

The recommendations will be discussed at the meeting of Suffolk County Council's Cabinet on Tuesday 11 July. Papers for the meeting can be viewed at <https://committeeminutes.suffolk.gov.uk>

[Councillor Kay Oakes](#)