

DISTRICT COUNCILLOR'S REPORT MARCH

Aggregated Council Tax Requirement

At the MSDC Council meeting on 22nd February members agreed that the General Fund Council Tax requirement should be increased by 2%, i.e. rising from £171.59 to £175.03 for a Band D property. The maximum suggested by the Government was an increase of 2.9%. Suffolk County Council had set their precept at £64, 828,416 which results in a Band D council tax of £1,571.04. The Police and Crime Commissioner had set their precept at £11,371,712, giving a Band D council tax of £275.58. Aggregated this gives a Band D council tax of £2,021.65.

The Parish precepts for Great Blakenham and Little Blakenham are forecast to increase from 23/24 to 24/25 with corresponding rises in Council Tax Band D. The precept for Somersham is forecast to remain unchanged; however, their Tax Base is forecast to increase slightly, giving a slight reduction in the Band D rate.

The Council introduced an ongoing 100% Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme last year. It is proposed to update the Income Bands by the Consumer Price Index (6.7%) to ensure that the scheme continues to support the most vulnerable households.

MSDC Housing Revenue Account Budget

At the February Council meeting members agreed to a proposed increase of 7.7% in council house rents (£7.33 for social rent and a 9.4% increase for affordable rent (RPI+0.5%). Other items agreed were:

An RPI increase of 8.9% in garage rents, equivalent to an average rent increase of £3.84 a month

An increase of 18% for sheltered housing service charges, equivalent of £27.10 a month

An increase of 44% for sheltered housing utility charges, equivalent to £29.63 a month.

Empty Homes and Second Homes – Council Tax Charges

At the February MSDC Council meeting the vote was carried to introduce a premium of 100% for second homes from 1st April 2025 and to increase charges for empty homes left unoccupied as follows:

Dwellings left unoccupied and substantially unfurnished for 12 months or more should incur a premium of 100% - going up to 200% after 2 years and 300% after ten years.

New Sports Facilities in Stowmarket

Plans for new sports facilities in Stowmarket, including a 3G football pitch, sports pavilion, multi-use games area, sports hall and mini athletics track, have been given the green light.

Mid Suffolk District Council had already agreed a full business case for the first part of its Stowmarket Health, Education and Leisure Facilities (SHELF) project.

Mid Suffolk's planning committee granted full planning permission for the first two parts of the scheme, and outline permission for the third – meaning the council's major investment in the town sporting facilities can now get under way.

The proposals focus on land surrounding Stowmarket High School and Chilton Fields, and follow extensive engagement with partner organisations and sports clubs.

The initial work also includes an improved pitch for Stowmarket Rugby Club, active track, cricket nets and additional paths and fencing.

These new facilities would be available for use by residents, sports groups and clubs.

Brownfield sites planning consultation opens

The government has announced on 13 February that councils in England will need to [prioritise brownfield developments](#).

The bar for refusing brownfield plans will also be made higher for those not reaching their locally agreed housebuilding targets. Planning authorities in England's 20 largest cities and towns will need to follow a 'brownfield presumption', if housebuilding drops below expected levels.

This will make it easier to get permission to build on previously developed brownfield sites.

[A consultation on these proposals](#) has launched today (13 February) and will run until Tuesday 26 March.

Additional consultation details:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/strengthening-planning-policy-for-brownfield-development/strengthening-planning-policy-for-brownfield-development>

Consultation opens on changes to various permitted development rights

On 13th February DLUHC launched a [consultation seeking views on changes to several existing permitted development rights](#) that allow for householder development, building upwards to create new homes, the demolition of certain buildings and rebuild as homes, electric vehicle charge points and air source heat pumps.

The consultation closes on 9 April 2024. If you have any questions, please contact PDRconsultation2024@levellingup.gov.uk

Consultation:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/changes-to-various->

[permitted-development-rights-consultation/changes-to-various-permitted-development-rights-consultation](#)

Expansion of the Affordable Homes Guarantee Scheme 2020

On 12th February DLUHC announced the [expansion of the Affordable Homes Guarantee Scheme](#), which provides low-cost, flexible and long-term loans to housing providers. The scheme can also now be used to upgrade existing properties.

A £3 billion increase in the government-backed loan will fund 20,000 new affordable homes.

As part of the scheme, providers will be able to apply for loans to help make homes fit for the future and to carry out vital building safety works, such as the removal of dangerous cladding.

The loans are funded by a capital markets bond programme. For further information about the scheme, the scheme rules, and how to apply, contact ARA Venn, which is delivering the scheme, at ahgs@ara-venn.com

Guidance:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/housing-guarantee-scheme-rules-affordable-homes-guarantee-scheme-2020>

Reforms to social housing allocations consultation – reminder

On 30 January, DLUHC launched [a consultation on reforms to social housing allocations](#).

The consultation seeks views from the public, councils, social housing tenants and providers on a range of reforms to how social housing is allocated in England, including to eligibility and qualification criteria, as well as proposals for the social housing waiting list and grounds for eviction.

The consultation will run for eight weeks and closes on 26 March. For any enquiries about the consultation, please contact socialhousingallocationsconsultation@levellingup.gov.uk

Announcement:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-social-housing-reforms-to-crack-down-on-rule-breakers>

Biodiversity net gain requirements

[The legal requirement for developers to deliver at least a 10% biodiversity net gain on new developments came into effect on Monday \(12 February\)](#).

On 14 February DLUHC published [guidance giving further information including on the biodiversity net gain statutory framework, planning processes, exemptions and appeals](#).

To help Local Planning Authorities integrate biodiversity net gain at a local level, £10.6 million of funding is being committed to help councils recruit and expand ecologist teams.

Further Information:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/biodiversity-net-gain>

Public health updates

Upcoming ‘No Smoking Day’

This March, the Department of Health and Social Care is launching a campaign to emphasise the health harms of smoking and encourage the 5.3 million smokers in England to quit.

Content will include the latest stats and facts about smoking, the harms of smoking and celebrating the 40th anniversary of No Smoking Day (13 March).

Any queries about the campaign can be sent to partnership@dhsc.gov.uk.

Latest measles statistics published and guidance for education settings – reminder

On 22nd February the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) published the [latest number of measles cases in England in an updated epidemiological overview](#).

Since the last update a week ago, a further 60 laboratory confirmed measles cases have been confirmed in England. This brings the total number of cases confirmed since 1 October 2023 to 581. Although the outbreak in the West Midlands initially drove the increase in cases, clusters of cases in other regions have continued to increase in the past week.

There is a range of guidance available on GOV.UK and linked below.

The Department for Education has published an [Education Hub blog](#) with guidance on measles and the MMR vaccine for parents, nurseries and schools.

On 22 January, NHS England launched [a campaign for missed MMR vaccines](#). The NHS campaign will see all parents of children aged from six to 11 years contacted encouraging them to make an appointment with their child's GP practice for their missed MMR vaccine.

UKHSA has also produced [a measles communications toolkit to support councils with messages on measles and the MMR vaccine](#). For further information contact: externalaffairs@ukhsa.gov.uk

Regulator of Social Housing publishes second fire safety remediation report for English social housing

On 22nd February, the [Regulator of Social Housing \(RSH\) published the findings from its second survey on the fire safety of 11 metre plus buildings in the social housing sector](#).

All social landlords are required to submit quarterly data to RSH and DLUHC on the fire safety remediation of relevant buildings for which they are responsible.

The results show that fire risk assessments have been undertaken on around 98% of all buildings reported, and the majority of remaining buildings will have one carried out in the next nine months.

RSH's report highlights the responsibility of boards and councillors to understand landlords' legal obligations in relation to managing the safety of buildings, seek assurance that they are being met, and address issues promptly so that tenants are safe in their homes.

RSH will continue to monitor the performance of landlords in remediating 11 metre plus buildings and the progress they are making against their plans.

Announcement:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/rsh-publishes-second-fire-safety-remediation-report-for-english-social-housing>

Plan to reduce anti-social behaviour rolled out nationwide

On 15th February [the government announced the latest step in the Anti-Social Behaviour Action Plan launched last year](#). Every police force in England and Wales will receive at least £1 million to increase patrols to tackle violence and disorder, targeted in areas with high levels of anti-social behaviour.

This approach has already been piloted in 10 areas, with over 80,000 hours of patrols in the six months since it launched. The £66m of funding announced today will be targeted in areas where there is high prevalence of violence, anti-social behaviour, and illegal public drug consumption.

In addition, the government has also set a new target to dismantle another 1,000 county lines by August.

Council Leaders warn of ‘catastrophic effect’ of Suffolk County Council budget plans

13/02/24

Proposed changes to Housing Related Support 'could impact on most vulnerable residents'.

The Leaders of Suffolk's district and borough councils have warned of "a catastrophic effect on hundreds of Suffolk's most vulnerable residents" should proposals contained within Suffolk County Council's Budget for 2024/25 be agreed.

Cllr John Ward (Babergh), Cllr Andy Mellen (Mid Suffolk), Cllr Caroline Topping (East Suffolk), Cllr Neil MacDonald (Ipswich), and Cllr Cliff Waterman (West Suffolk) have written to the County Council, expressing their grave concern with the proposed changes to Housing Related Support (HRS); a temporary housing scheme which assists people in the care of Suffolk's Social and Children's Services.

HRS is a model which helps individuals learn the skills needed to live independently prior to rehousing by district and borough councils, and it is a vital part of the pathway to prevent or relieve homelessness. However, Suffolk County Council now intends to remove all funding, and decommission the scheme by March 2025, having signed a five-year contract with support providers only just over a year ago.

In the letter sent to Suffolk County Council, the Leaders have urged the authority to work with district and boroughs, and to reverse this decision, which they believe does not consider the longer-term impacts - not just on the county's most vulnerable people, but on the budgets that this approach will supposedly relieve.

They wrote: "The Housing Related Support service provides over 700 accommodation places, delivered through multiple specialist providers. These specialist providers, many of whom are charities, provide support to tenants to help them live independently. This service is not available via any other route, and we understand that there is a waiting list of around 400 people.

"The client groups for Housing Related Support are amongst the most vulnerable in Suffolk. They include 16- and 17-year-olds who have no family with whom to live, 18-year-old care-leavers and unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. They also include young people who are also

parents. Without your supported accommodation, many of these children and young people will add further pressure to your Children and Young People Services budget.

"Clients also include adults with mental health conditions or learning disabilities, a history of drug or alcohol dependency, or those being released from prison. It's likely that the lack of supported housing for these individuals will place additional pressure on your other Adult and Community Services budgets.

"If people who previously qualified for Housing Related Support, are left without accommodation then rough sleeping will increase. We know that this will impact on these vulnerable people's health, that they are more likely to begin or continue substance misuse, and to suffer from mental health issues. The impact of this will increase demand on other County Council services which are already stretched.

"We recognise that times are tough and that difficult decisions need to be made. But we believe that a decision to end Housing Related Support is short-sighted and will haunt Suffolk County Council in years to come as the implications come to fruition."

Councils' loft insulation offer for Suffolk homes

09/02/24

Funding is available to help Suffolk residents make their homes warmer and save money on their energy bills

Funding is available to help Suffolk residents make their homes warmer and save money on their energy bills.

Suffolk's Public Sector Leaders, which includes Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils, have launched a Suffolk Loft Insulation offer.

Thanks to teaming up with builders' merchant Travis Perkins, Suffolk residents can get a significant reduction on loft insulation.

There are four product options available and residents will receive a 50% discount off their purchase (up to £200), with free delivery.

According to The Energy Saving Trust, it is estimated that an uninsulated home loses a quarter of its heat through its roof.

An effective way to reduce this heat loss, and heating bills, is to insulate your loft, attic or flat roof.

Correctly installed insulation should pay for itself many times over in its 40-year lifetime.

Cllr Gerald Kelly, chair of the Suffolk environment cabinet members group, said:

"Good insulation is a simple addition to immediately improve the warmth and comfort of your home. This should mean you have to put the heating on less, which will save you money and also be making a positive contribution to climate change.

"Suffolk Public Sector Leaders are continually looking for ways like the Loft Insulation Grant to support Suffolk residents to have more energy efficient homes, and drive down the county's carbon emissions for a more sustainable future."

Andrew Hunt, Account Manager at Travis Perkins has said:

"Travis Perkins is thrilled to be working with Suffolk's councils to offer this fantastic support for Suffolk residents.

"With energy prices still high and an ambition to reduce Suffolk's carbon emissions, we're delighted to offer a discount which will benefit and reach many."

The offer is open to anyone and will close once the allocated funding has been spent.

To find out more [visit the Green Suffolk website](#) and simply fill out the online order form.

Travis Perkins will then get in touch to arrange payment and delivery.

The Loft Insulation Grant is being funded by Suffolk's Public Sector Leaders and Travis Perkins and will help contribute to Suffolk's Climate Emergency Plan and our vision for Suffolk to become Carbon Neutral by 2030.

Adrienne Marriott
Blakenham District Councillor
05/03/24