

DISTRICT COUNCILLOR'S REPORT OCTOBER 2024

Simpler Recycling – Recycling and Refuse Collections

Government has legislated for councils to align their recycling and waste services with new nationwide 'Simpler Recycling' requirements by 31 March 2026. MSDC will need to ensure that from that date collections are made for glass, cartons, glass and food. From 2027 a further collection for plastic film will take place. Suffolk Authorities had already approved the introduction of weekly food collections by end March 26.

The Materials Recovery Facility (MRF) which processes Suffolk's recyclables will need to be retooled to cope with the new mix of hard materials, including glass. This means that significant changes will need to be made to the plant through the contract with Biffa which is managed by SCC for all the district and borough councils in Suffolk.

Ways of effecting these changes to recycling waste delivery were discussed at this month's Council meeting on 26th September. Options were to continue collecting all materials in one bin (co-mingling) or to provide an extra wheelie bin, box or re-usable bag (twin-streaming). The recycling would then be separated out by the households into one container for plastics, metal, cartons (including Tetra-Pak) and glass bottles and jars - let's call this Recycling A, and another container for paper and card – let's call this Recycling B.

Twin streaming is said to both reduce overall contamination and to be cheaper than co-mingling. The indicative capital investment required to retool the MRF is £41/tonne versus £75/tonne for fully co-mingled. Currently it appears that all the Suffolk authorities bar Ipswich are going for twin streaming whilst only Ipswich is in favour of co-mingling.

Cabinet and the Full Council approved recommendations for twin-stream recycling to include three weekly collections for refuse, one-weekly collections for food waste and two-weekly collections for garden waste. In every three weeks there would also be one collection for Recycling A and another for Recycling B.

We were told that a continuation of the current two-weekly refuse collection arrangements would mean crews and vehicles operating inefficiently, travelling the same routes but collecting significantly less waste tonnage and mostly empty bins. However, special arrangements could be put in place for large families and families producing greater residual waste. Thought would need to be given to the disposal of nappies. Alternative and more easily manoevrable receptacles, e.g. a box or a bag could be provided for elderly/disabled residents. There would be an overall need to communicate the new strategy effectively with further implications for people for whom English is not a first language, e.g. using visual materials.

Mid Suffolk Growth Ltd. and Babergh Growth Ltd.

At the Joint Audit and Standards Group meeting on 23rd September there was considerable discussion among members regarding the financial outcomes of these ventures.

Both councils owned 50% of the respective companies, Babergh Growth and Mid Suffolk Growth whilst the other 50% was in each case owned by Norse Group Holdings Ltd., a property management company based in Norwich. At Needham Market the development of the old Mid Suffolk Council offices was to be in two phases. Phase 1 has now been completed but Mid Suffolk have now pulled out from the second phase, aiming to sell the remaining development land to generate a capital receipt for the council. They aim to repay the remaining loan by November 2024.

The decision not to proceed may have been affected by the loss undertaken by Babergh District Council on the development of their former council offices in Hadleigh. It is currently anticipated that Babergh will make a loss of around £3m.

Street Cleaning and Ground Maintenance

Mid Suffolk councillors are considering a £360K boost for street cleansing and ground maintenance – including the creation of a new troubleshooting taskforce to tackle litter hotspots, flytipping, and graffiti across the district.

Cabinet members are due to consider a proposal to enhance public realm services at their meeting next week, increasing scheduled street cleaning and ground maintenance work in Stowmarket town centre, and creating REACT – a Respond, Enforce and Clean Team – to provide additional capacity to respond to urgent and reactive street clearing issues across the district.

According to a report published ahead of next Tuesday's cabinet meeting (October 8), the creation of REACT will allow the public realm street cleansing team to focus on scheduled work across the district's large rural area – including dog and litter bin emptying, litter picking on the main rural road routes and villages, and mechanical sweeping – without the distraction of having to respond to reactive cleansing incidents.

The new team would also play a role in education and enforcement, giving advice on street cleansing issues, patrolling problem areas, gathering evidence and issuing warnings and notices, working alongside the council's environmental protection team, where appropriate.

Minimum energy efficiency standards for rental properties and a new Warm Homes: Local Grant announced

On 23rd September, the government announced plans to improve home energy standards to help deliver the safety and security of warmer, cheaper homes that are free from damp and mould - <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/home-upgrade-revolution-as-renters-set-for-warmer-homes-and-cheaper-bills>.

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government will shortly consult on proposals for private and social rented homes to achieve Energy Performance Certificate C or equivalent by 2030.

The government has also announced a new Warm Homes: Local Grant to help low-income homeowners and private tenants with energy performance upgrades and cleaner heating. In addition, continuation of the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme has been confirmed, as well as the Warm Homes: Social Housing Fund, which replaces the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund, to support social housing providers and tenants.

Young people reminded to claim their Child Trust Fund

On 24th September HM Revenue and Customs reminded 18 to 22 year olds to claim their Child Trust Fund:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/671000-young-people-urged-to-cash-in-their-government-savings-pot>

Child Trust Funds are long term, tax-free savings accounts which were set up, with the government depositing £250, for every child born between 1 September 2002 and 2 January 2011. Young people can take control of their Child Trust Fund at 16 and withdraw funds when they turn 18 and the account matures. The average savings pot is worth £2,212.

The savings are not held by government but are held in banks, building societies or other saving providers. The money stays in the account until it's withdrawn or re-invested.

If teenagers or their parents and guardians already know who their Child Trust Fund provider is, they can contact them directly. If they do not know where their account is, they can use the online tool on gov.uk to find out their Child Trust Fund provider.

Further information on Child Trust Funds and how to access your savings can be found on gov.uk. Councils are encouraged to share this information as appropriate.

Online tool:

<https://www.gov.uk/child-trust-funds/find-a-child-trust-fund>

Decent Homes Standard for the rented sectors consultation

On 22nd September The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) announced that it will consult on a new Decent Homes Standard for the rented sectors.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/measures-to-ensure-decent-homes-for-all>

The consultation, which will launch as soon as possible, will look to ensure safe, secure housing is the standard people can expect in both social housing and private rented properties.

The government will also bring forward legislation for Awaab's Law in the social rented sector this autumn, so hazards such as damp and mould must be investigated and remedied within set timescales.

Alongside this, MHCLG will introduce new access to information requirements for housing associations, to enable tenants from the 2.5 million homes managed by housing associations to hold their landlords to account.

MHCLG will also introduce a Competence and Conduct standard for the social rented sector that will ensure staff have the right skills, behaviours and experience to carry out the role. The new

standard will include qualification requirements for senior managers and executives.

The government will bring forward further plans for high quality housebuilding through the revised National Planning Policy Framework this autumn (NPPF), following the NPPF consultation which closed on 24th September.

New ‘brownfield passports’ to support and expedite approval of urban sites for development

Yesterday (22 September), the government announced plans to support and expedite approval of urban sites, such as car parks:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-brownfield-passports-to-seize-the-growth-opportunities-of-urban-areas>.

As signalled in the National Planning Policy Framework consultation, the government is taking further steps toward the introduction of an effective ‘brownfield passport’ to ensure where proposals meet design and quality standards, the default answer is yes.

A call for evidence will be launched on options to further increase certainty in relation to brownfield development.

Rural Flood Resilience Partnership launched to help farmers and rural communities adapt to a changing climate

The government has today (23 September) launched a partnership to support rural flood resilience and help farmers and communities adapt to a changing climate.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/rural-flood-resilience-partnership-launched-to-help-farmers-and-rural-communities-adapt-to-a-changing-climate>

The Rural Flood Resilience Partnership has been established to improve collaboration, deepen understanding of vulnerabilities, and support rural communities and agricultural businesses in building their resilience to present and future flood risks and coastal erosion.

The Partnership has just published its work plan covering 2024 to 2026. The work plan sets out 21 actions supporting seven strategic outcomes focused on: developing the evidence base behind decision-making to increase resilience; ensuring communities, farmers and landowners have access to quality advice and support; and engaging rural communities in flood resilience.

The Partnership unites organisations representing government agencies, trade associations, rural communities and businesses. The six equal founding partners are: Action with Communities in Rural England; the Association of Drainage Authorities; Country Land and Business Association; the Environment Agency; the National Farmers Union; and Natural England.

Public health update

New measures introduced to tackle Bluetongue – updated

On 21 September, the UK Chief Veterinary Officer set out further measures to tackle bluetongue virus:

[https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-measures-introduced-to-tackle-bluetongue-and-protect-farmers-livelihoodso-mitigate-the-spread-of-bluetongue-virus-serotype-3-\(BTV-3\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-measures-introduced-to-tackle-bluetongue-and-protect-farmers-livelihoodso-mitigate-the-spread-of-bluetongue-virus-serotype-3-(BTV-3)).

Bluetongue virus is primarily transmitted by midge bites and affects cattle, goats, sheep, goats, deer and camelids, such as llamas and alpacas, with case numbers now increasing dramatically in northern Europe.

On 13 September 2024: following the identification of 3 further cases of BTV-3 in Essex and 1 in Norfolk, the restricted zone covering Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex was extended to cover part of Greater London East and part of Kent. This has now been widened to cover all of Lincolnshire, Cambridgeshire, Bedfordshire, Hertfordshire, Greater London, Surrey and West Sussex as well as the East Riding of Yorkshire.

Get Winter Strong campaign launched

The UK Health Security Agency, Department for Health and Social Care, and NHS England have today (30 September) announced the launch of the Get Winter Strong Campaign on 7th October to help reduce the impact of winter viruses on those most at risk, as well as ease NHS winter pressures.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/18000-flu-related-deaths-in-past-2-winters-as-jab-uptake-falls>

The campaign will urge those eligible to get their flu and COVID-19 vaccinations when invited, ahead of winter, targeting those at greatest risk and for the first time will encourage pregnant women to also get their respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) and whooping cough vaccination.

As of last week (23 September), eligible people in England can now book their flu and COVID-19 vaccinations through the NHS, with appointments starting from 3 October. For their RSV jab, pregnant women and older adults should speak to their maternity service or GP practice to arrange it.

The campaign will run for 10 weeks and will appear on broadcast TV, on demand and community TV, as well as radio channels, outdoor poster sites in England and on social media channels.

*Adrienne Marriott
Blakenham District Councillor
01/10/2024*