

DISTRICT COUNCILLOR REPORT DECEMBER 25

Proposals for Unitary Local Government

On 19th November, Alison McGovern, Minister of State for Local Government and Homelessness wrote to the Leaders of Suffolk District, Borough and County Councils to thank them for their continued work and collaboration to bring forward proposals for unitary local government. She wrote that for the next stage of local government reorganisation, the government's approach would be to consult on all submissions that sought to meet the terms of the 5 February 2025 statutory invitation, clarifying that the consultation on the two proposals received from our invitation area would be available at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/suffolk-local-government-reorganisation>

until 11 January 2026. Responses could be made by email and post as well as online. Artificial Intelligence would be used to assist officials to analyse the responses received, as set out in the consultation documentation. Named consultees were listed in the consultation documentation, but the Minister would like to hear the views of all those interested in these proposals, including local residents, town and parish councils, residents' associations, businesses and the voluntary and community sector.

There is more information on the Three Councils for Suffolk Website where there are also Q & As which might help to address questions from residents.

New Mid Suffolk Youth Council will give young people a say

Young people in Mid Suffolk are to be given ‘a voice for change’ after councillors gave cross-party support this week for the creation of a new Youth Council.

The new group is aimed at getting young people involved and engaged with politics – providing a real opportunity for Mid Suffolk Youth Council members to help shape their local communities.

The go ahead was granted by councillors at Mid Suffolk District Council on Thursday, following a motion outlining the current disconnect between young people and politics – highlighted in a recent Electoral Commission survey.

The survey gathered information about how young people aged between 11-25 viewed politics at both a local and national level, with findings showing that almost three quarters of those asked believed that politics should be taught more in schools or colleges.

The motion was proposed by Cllr Lucy Elkin and received unanimous support from councillors across the political divide. Discussion amongst councillors had highlighted that the Youth Council was not to be run on a ‘party political’ basis but rather would give young people the opportunity to understand political and critical thinking.

MSDC Biodiversity and Nature Recovery Budget

A cross-party working group, of which I am a member, was formed in August 2023 to develop a new, more ambitious Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) for the next five-year period. This was published on the Council’s website in January 2025 and recognises the benefits that the BAP can deliver on issues such as water quality, flood management and public health and well-being.

Mid Suffolk District Council has committed £1.8 million over the next three years to accelerate work which enhances biodiversity and nature – in a bid to safeguard the environment for generations. The investment is a major step towards reversing habitat loss and supporting wildlife across the district.

Both Mid Suffolk's cabinet and full council have agreed portions of the funding.

This will come from a new dedicated biodiversity and nature recovery budget and 2025/26 reserves respectively.

Approval comes alongside a revised Biodiversity Action Plan covering the five years up to 2030, which received cross-party endorsement at the recent Council Meeting on Thursday 27th November.

The plan focuses on priority habitats and species in Mid Suffolk. The former comprise

- Habitats in farmed landscapes
- Traditional orchards
- Neutral and calcareous grassland and
- Still water habitats.

Priority species are

- Swifts
- Hedgehogs
- Toads and
- Bumblebees

Around half of the Nature Recovery Grant funding is going towards community nature recovery and will facilitate biodiversity initiatives in parishes and towns within the Mid Suffolk area. The remaining monies will go for catchment and landscape nature recovery and will be focussed on the river catchments of Mid Suffolk including their tributaries, their riparian corridors and surrounding catchments. This will support others to deliver nature recovery on their own land.

Further details are expected over the coming year.

Targeted projects are also included, such as:

- restoring ecosystems
- creating, enhancing and protecting wildlife corridors and habitats
- expanding tree and wildflower planting

The council will also continue to work collaboratively with Suffolk Wildlife Trust and other local partners to deliver its vision.

Better Recycling

Mid Suffolk District Council have given the above name to the government’s Simpler Recycling initiative. The new collection schedules were discussed at the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 20th November and I found that June 2026 is now the roll-out date, i.e.

New (standard) collection schedule (from June 2026)

Waste type	Bin details	Collection frequency
Refuse (general rubbish)	180l black wheeled bin	Three-weekly
Mixed recycling	240l blue-lidded wheeled bin	Three-weekly
Paper and card	240l green-lidded wheeled bin	Three-weekly
Food waste	23l external caddy (grey)	Weekly
Garden waste	240l brown wheeled bin (subscription-based)	Fortnightly

Additional arrangements, e.g. more bins, larger bins, more frequent collections might be needed to cater to the special needs of large families and people with physical and cognitive disabilities. Waste officers are additionally undertaking a property audit/review to determine suitability for the standard service. MSDC will also be surveying businesses regarding their service needs.

A digital newsletter/bulletin will go out to Parish Councils in January 2026 for them to share with interested parties and pre-information packs will go out to residents in February 2026. District Councillors will also be

given information packs this coming February and Primary, district-specific packs will go out from May 2026.

The Council had decided not to pursue the building of a new depot, given the government reorganisation plans. However, from this month improvements will be carried out at both their Creeting Road and Chilton Depots. These will include improvements to crew and office areas and reconfiguring storage, drainage and electrical works as well as the installation of new charging points at each site.

To accommodate the additional food waste vehicles and crew, the HGV parking layout at Creeting Road will be rearranged from 1st December.

Mid Suffolk Rural Support Fund

This fund is still open for applications. It was created to support towns and villages outside of Stowmarket in response to concerns from councillors about levels of funding allocated to projects within the town. More information can be found on the Mid Suffolk website.

The fund, which allocates £300,000 annually, supports various projects like saving threatened community assets (e.g., pubs and shops), improving shopfronts, and enhancing local environments. It also includes a separate Community Asset Fund specifically for trying to save threatened village facilities

Mid Suffolk is home to a wide variety of community pubs, shops and cafés, in communities and locations which would otherwise lack such provision. This includes Coddendam's award-winning community shop, Thurston Café at Thurston's New Green Centre and Suffolk's first community owned and operated pub, the Punch Bowl in Battisford. While there are hundreds of thriving hospitality businesses throughout the District, there are villages where the pub or shop, often the heart of a rural community, has closed in recent years, leaving the parish without often essential facilities. The Community Asset Fund is only open to parishes and villages which lack, or at risk of losing, such an asset. As such, villages or towns with a pub, shop or café (depending on the proposed social enterprise) are ineligible to apply.

Applications must demonstrate a clear need for their project and the asset within their community and Mid Suffolk. There must also be clear and evidenced wider community backing, buy-in and involvement for the purchase of the asset. Applications which are not fully filled or lack required supporting documentation will not be considered eligible.

Expressions of interest can be submitted at any time with the Fund open on a first come, first served basis.

Natural England sets out new vision for nature and growth with corporate strategy

On 6th November Natural England launched “Recovering Nature for Growth, Health and Security:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/natural-englands-strategy-recovering-nature-for-growth-health-and-security>

a plan to help drive nature recovery across landscapes and support economic growth, house building and infrastructure development.

The new strategy clears a pathway to making nature-based solutions an integral part of how we build and invest for the future. It sets out how Natural England will support business to deliver its ambitions while growing nature. A key part of the strategy is a shift away from site-by-site species-by-species interventions and towards achieving nature recovery at scale across whole landscapes and seascapes.

Reminder: Voter identification research published

As outlined in the government’s Strategy for Elections

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/restoring-trust-in-our-democracy-our-strategy-for-modern-and-secure-elections>

published earlier this year, new legislation will be introduced to allow UK-issued bank cards to be used as an accepted form of ID in a polling station.

Research has shown that by adding UK-issued bank cards to the list of accepted IDs, the current ID ownership gap among the UK adult population will drop from between 2-4% to less than 1%.

Local Government updates

Housebuilding around train stations will be given default “yes”

On 18 November the government announced that housebuilding near well-connected train stations will receive a default “yes” in future if they meet certain rules:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/housebuilding-around-train-stations-will-be-given-default-yes>

Housebuilders will be encouraged to build more homes near these transport links, and councils in England will also now be required to inform the government when they intend to reject new housing developments over a certain size, with the Housing Secretary able to have the final say on whether they should go ahead.

These changes will be introduced alongside proposals to streamline the statutory consultee process.

Planning reforms will be proposed through a new National Planning Policy Framework, which will be consulted on later this year.

The default “yes” will also apply equally across all councils. The proposals will also include minimum housing density standards for

these sites. Measures will also require councils to inform government when they're inclined to block applications of 150 homes or more so Ministers can decide whether to step in and make the decision instead.

Particular attention will be paid to those applications where a planning committee intends to refuse it contrary to the advice of planning officers.

Police Governance Reform statement

On 13th November the government announced, through an oral statement, proposals to strengthen police governance by abolishing police and crime commissioners at the end of their current term in 2028:

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-statements/detail/2025-11-13/hcws1058>

Police governance functions will be transferred either to Mayors of Strategic Authorities or, where this is not possible, to elected council leaders through new Police and Crime Boards.

This is the first in a series of reforms that will be set out in the forthcoming Police Reform White Paper.

Report warns of widespread drought in 2026 without a wet winter

On 14 November, the Environment Agency published its Drought Prospects Report:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/drought-prospects-for-spring-2026>

examining the wet weather needed through the winter to ensure the country's current low water levels recover by spring 2026.

Despite recent rainfall, the drought situation across the country is still precarious following a record dry spring and a continued run of heatwaves and dry weather throughout the summer.

The new report analyses three different rainfall scenarios over winter and what each one would mean for water security across England's regions ahead of next year's traditionally drier months. Without average rainfall, most of England will experience a drought with widespread impacts felt by consumers, farmers, businesses, and nature.

The Environment Agency is urging the public to continue to play their part and use water wisely through winter, in anticipation of another drought year.

UK Commission on Covid Commemoration: government response

On 13th November the government published its response to the UK Commission on Covid Commemoration's report:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-government-response-to-report-by-the-uk-commission-on-covid-commemoration>

The Commission, headed by Baroness Morgan of Cotes, was created under the previous administration to make recommendations on how the United Kingdom can commemorate the loss of life and honour the sacrifice and public service of key workers during the pandemic.

The government has committed to take forward a number of the recommendations in the report, including:

- Preservation of the National Covid Memorial Wall
- A UK wide COVID-19 Day of Reflection
- Creating new spaces for reflection
- Fellowship scheme on future natural hazards
- New GOV.UK commemoration web pages

Public health update

UKHSA urges eligible groups to get vaccinated with just four weeks to go until Christmas

On 27th November the UK Health Security Agency urged all eligible groups to make sure that they are up to date with their vaccinations in the run up to Christmas

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/ukhsa-weekly-winter-surveillance-bulletin>

as levels of respiratory viruses including flu and RSV continue to increase.

The vaccinations offered for flu, respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) and COVID-19 help provide the best protection against severe illness and hospitalisation. Flu causes thousands of hospitalisations every year and RSV is the leading cause of infant mortality globally, which highlights why UKHSA is calling on eligible groups to get vaccinated.

This week the data showed:

- influenza activity increased and is circulating at low levels
- COVID-19 activity decreased across most indicators and is at baseline levels
- RSV activity increased and is circulating at low-medium levels

*Adrienne Marriott
Blakenham District Councillor
01/12/25*