

DISTRICT COUNCILLOR REPORT OCTOBER 25

Council says mayor must belong to us all

The government should not disadvantage Suffolk by using a voting system in the election of a powerful new regional mayor which may not provide a strong democratic mandate, Mid Suffolk District Council has said.

The first Suffolk and Norfolk mayor is set to be elected in May 2026 and will lead a new Mayoral County Combined Authority with devolved powers from government – including strategic oversight of transport, economic development, housing and infrastructure.

The government has announced its intentions for regional mayors to be elected using the Supplementary Voting system, which is designed to ensure broad support for the successful candidate.

It allows voters to express both a first and second choice preference. If no candidate achieves over 50% of first-preference votes, all but the top two candidates are eliminated, and second-preference votes are redistributed to determine the winner.

However, Suffolk and Norfolk are on the Devolution Priority Programme, so the mayoral election will happen before many other areas – and it is unlikely Supplementary Voting will be in place before then.

That means the First Past the Post system – used in local and general elections – would be used.

At Mid Suffolk's full council meeting on 25 September, councillors heard that under First Past the Post, the West of England mayor was elected in May last year with 25% of the vote (7.5% of the electorate on a 30% turnout).

Three councils for Suffolk business case submitted to the government

Plans to transform local services were agreed this week by Suffolk's district and borough councils, as well as cabinet members, and have been submitted to the Government.

The proposals set out a new model of three unitary councils - replacing the current six - which will save at least £34m a year, with £20m reinvested annually into vital local services. The new councils will be "big enough to deliver, local enough to care", keeping decision-making rooted in communities while cutting duplication and waste.

Backed by independent analysis from the Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE), the proposals also show how £67.5m more could be unlocked every year by localising adult and children's services, with a sharper focus on prevention and early help.

Every district and borough council in Suffolk has debated and approved the proposal, finalising the Case for Change. The proposals carry cross-party and geographic support, ensuring momentum for change.

The plans meet the Government's criteria for unitary authorities - a clear rationale, sensible geographies, and areas you as residents can identify with and is based on robust, local evidence. For you, the change means simplicity: one unitary council where you live

The three proposed councils will serve Central & Eastern Suffolk, Western Suffolk and Ipswich & Southern Suffolk. And the proposed model will deliver:

- **Value for money:** Cutting six councils to three, self-funding in five years, unlocking £34m annual savings plus £20m reinvestment. Independent analysis shows a further £67.5m benefit from localised, prevention-led social care.
- **Local first:** Councils rooted in your communities, supporting voluntary groups and ensuring fairer funding.
- **Fairer council tax:** Equalisation within one year, with no household paying more by 2028/29 than they would under the current system.
- **Better services:** Local delivery, tailored to Suffolk's diverse needs, geography and history.

- **Stronger democracy:** Councillors that are close to you and the communities they serve, with deep local knowledge and the capacity to represent you effectively. Smaller wards mean councillors are more accessible, responsive, and attuned to you and your local priorities.
- **Innovation and improvement:** More agile councils, better able to adapt and transform.
- **A louder Suffolk voice:** Stronger representation alongside the new Norfolk & Suffolk mayor.

The Three Councils for Suffolk Case for Change is rooted in public engagement, including over 2,200 survey responses to an online survey in which one-third of people ranked “being local” as their top priority for future councils.

32,000 solar panels and counting for Solar Together Suffolk project

The successful Solar Together Suffolk scheme is now open for registration for 2025. The group-buying programme enables Suffolk residents to buy solar panels and battery storage, helping to save money on their energy bills and cut carbon emissions.

It is backed by Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils, along with the other district and borough councils, and Suffolk County Council.

Solar Together Suffolk, <https://solartogether.co.uk/suffolk/home> has been running for seven years, and in that time, has:

- installed 32,024 solar panels at 2,651 Suffolk households
- installed 1,768 battery storage systems
- reduced 1,900 tonnes of carbon emissions across the county

It’s free to register with Solar Together Suffolk and receive an installation quote - there is no obligation to go ahead with the installation.

The project helps homeowners feel confident that they are paying the right price for a high-quality installation from qualified installers, and increases their independence from the national grid.

The scheme not only offers solar panels, but also battery storage and EV charge points. Customers who have already invested in solar panels can also get quotes for battery storage, to get more from the renewable energy they generate.

Grant returns to tackle winter loneliness

A grant aimed at tackling social isolation during the colder months has returned for a third consecutive year thanks to continued funding from Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils.

The Living Well in Winter grant supports local organisations – including town and parish councils, village hall and playing field committees, sports clubs and centres, charities, social enterprises, community shops and community interest companies – to deliver accessible, inclusive spaces and affordable activities that help people stay connected throughout winter.

Last year, the scheme funded 25 projects across both districts (12 in Babergh and 13 in Mid Suffolk), ranging from warm spaces and coffee mornings to movie showings and dance classes.

Funding available for initiatives that promote social connections, physical and mental wellbeing, and access to welcoming community hubs.

Eligible projects might include lunch clubs, after-school clubs, low-cost family sports sessions, craft workshops, community cafes, or any other initiative that brings people together and supports residents through the colder months.

Up to £2,000 can be applied for and applications must be submitted by Sunday 19 October.

New emergency temporary accommodation for those most in need

Babergh and Mid Suffolk Councils are to invest in additional temporary accommodation – helping those at risk of homelessness.

The councils have agreed to invest in 30 new properties in each district to be used for temporary accommodation.

As of March 2025, the councils were housing a total of 158 households in emergency accommodation, including women and children fleeing domestic abuse and vulnerable adults with complex needs who might otherwise be sleeping rough

Councillors heard how rising demand for temporary accommodation has seen Mid Suffolk's needs nearly double between the 2020/21 financial year and 2024/25, while Babergh's need increased by 69 per cent. This has led to the councils increasingly relying on bed and breakfast hotel accommodation, costing them in the region of £70K each month.

To qualify for emergency temporary accommodation, someone must be legally homeless, meet all necessary immigration and residence conditions and have a priority need for housing. Anyone eligible, who would otherwise be sleeping rough, is then housed in temporary accommodation as a short-term measure while the council attempts to find longer-term solutions for them.

Twelve new electrical recycling banks installed in Babergh and Mid Suffolk

Babergh and Mid Suffolk Councils have launched a new recycling scheme for electrical items. Residents can dispose of their broken electrical items like coffee machines, kettles, mobile phones, tablets and anything smaller than a 4-slice toaster.

The Mid Suffolk bins are located at:

- Station Yard car park, Needham Market
- Iliffe Way car park, Stowmarket
- Mid Suffolk Leisure Centre, Stowmarket
- Elmswell Train Station
- New Green Community Centre, Thurston

- Buckshorn Lane car park, Eye

The scheme has been supported by £47,000 from Material Focus' Electrical Recycling Fund, a not for profit organisation.

'Pride in Place' programme launched

On 25th September, the Prime Minister announced a nationwide relaunch of this programme

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/communities-to-seize-control-over-high-streets-and-restore-pride>

whereby people are given the power to revitalise their neglected high streets, create new spaces for young people and save local pubs or libraries, to breathe new life into neglected communities.

The scheme, which first launched in 2023, aims to fund initiatives that promote local identity, tidy up the environment and help people be proud of where they live.

Locally, town councils, parish councils and local voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise (VCFSE) organisations are eligible to apply for grants between £250 and £5,000, with a total pot of £50,000 once again available.

In the previous funding window, which opened in November 2024, the Pride in Your Place grant was used to fund 20 unique projects.

Successful applications included a new history trail in Bramford, footpath resurfacing in Thorndon, improvements to the engineer's memorial in Eye, a new bus stop bench in Gislingham, and much more.

Projects may include, but are not limited to:

- Community planting schemes
- Local heritage and cultural initiatives
- New signage

- Benches and seating areas for public use
- Maintenance or improvement of green spaces
- Equipment for community clean-up events and litter picks

The applications window is now open and will remain so until the £50,000 budget has been fully allocated.

The new nationwide Pride in your Place Programme would seem to be more ambitious than the existing one.

It aims to tackle deprivation and regional inequality through wide-ranging action, including:

- Community Right to Buy: handing local people the power to buy beloved assets, helping them turn around derelict pubs, create new parks and regenerate treasured spaces in the heart of their communities.
- Compulsory Purchase powers: allowing communities in England to acquire assets like boarded up shops and derelict abandoned businesses, allowing new local start-ups to thrive. For larger sites – like disused department stores or abandoned office blocks – this could even enable new health centres to open up, or for local housing to help reach the government’s target of 1.5 million homes.
- Power to block unwanted shops: empowering councils in England to say no to new betting shops, vapes stores and fake barbers.

It is currently unclear what funding streams will be available to effect these changes.

Common Ground Award funding – prospectus published

On 19 September, MHCLG launched a Common Ground Award

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/common-ground-award-prospectus/common-ground-award-prospectus>

for Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector organisations that are bringing people together from different backgrounds.

The grant is open to applications from VCSE organisations with a base and operating in England, with charitable, benevolent or philanthropic purposes. Up to £1.7 million capital funding is available in 2025 and 2026 and will be distributed in payments of up to £10,000 per successful applicant.

The Common Ground Award aims to:

- identify and reward good practice in building bridging social capital
- invest in the physical spaces and equipment that enables good practice
- build a community of practice, for knowledge sharing across the voluntary and community sector and with government

Applications must state the level of funding required and confirm that it can be committed for spending by 31 March 2026.

Capital grants can be used to support new builds, refurbishment, and expansion of facilities used to build bridging social capital. Funding

can also cover essential equipment, such as laptops or furniture for the property.

The fund opens on 14 October and the deadline to submit an application is 21 November. Funding will be awarded in January 2026.

Funding to help support farming innovation

On 1 September, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs announced £12.6 million in government funding to help support innovation in UK farming.

The fund aims to cut business costs, improve productivity and tackle industry challenges. It will deliver projects ranging from robotic strawberry pickers to early-warning health systems. The funding competitions include:

- Small Research and Development (R&D) Partnerships: Up to £7.8 million for later-stage projects to help businesses develop new farming products or services and move them closer to the market. The competition opens on 15 September.
- Feasibility studies: Up to £4.8 million for early-stage proposals to test and develop ideas and whether to invest in larger R&D projects. The competition opens on 13 October.

Councils are encouraged to share this information as appropriate.

Apply for funding:

<https://apply-for-innovation-funding.service.gov.uk/competition/2010/overview/bcd5cf06-313c-4197-ae47-0035f674717f>

Easy read guides to support disabled workers

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) has recently published easy-to-read guides to help support disabled workers and workers with long-term health conditions.

<https://www.hse.gov.uk/disability/easy-read-support.htm>

Easy read is a way of making written information easier to understand. It uses simple language, short sentences and clear images to help explain content.

It is increasingly used to help people who have a learning disability and can also be useful for people who speak English as a second language.

HSE has added six easy read guides to their disabled workers guidance..

Workers can find the complete collection on HSE's website.

'Bacteria love it here' campaign

On 23rd September, the Food Standards Agency (FSA) launched a food safety campaign called 'Bacteria love it here', which aims to help consumers understand the dangers of bacteria in the domestic kitchen and highlights risky behaviours that could occur when cooking and preparing food. The campaign educates consumers on correct and hygienic habits that they should take to keep themselves safe and to prevent illnesses like food poisoning.

The campaign appeals to a wide audience, as the topic is relevant to anyone who cooks and prepares food at home. As September is a time when many young adults move away from home for the first time, the FSA is targeting activity to reach students and young adults. These groups may not have regularly cooked and prepared food before and may be unaware of good food hygiene habits. The campaign is also relevant to those who are considered vulnerable,

including older, pregnant and immunocompromised people, who are at higher risk of becoming unwell from food poisoning.

The campaign will run until the end of October, and in November/December the FSA will move onto a Christmas focused phase. They will share further resources with councils targeting consumers and businesses on food safety during the festive period.

National vaccination campaign launched to protect newborns this winter

On 22nd September, the Department of Health and Social Care launched a new national vaccination campaign, “Stay Strong. Get Vaccinated” to protect newborn babies.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/national-vaccination-campaign-to-protect-newborns-this-winter>

Expectant mothers are being urged to get vaccinated against flu, RSV and whooping cough to protect their babies this winter.

It comes as the NHS ramps up preparations for winter to provide the safest possible care for patients, with local NHS leaders taking part in ‘stress test’ exercises and providing targeted care for the most vulnerable. Alongside this, patients are being urged to protect themselves and their families against winter viruses.

The multi-channel campaign supported by the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) and NHS England will be shown across TV, video on demand, radio, outdoor advertising and social media. A second phase of the campaign in October will aim to encourage people with long-term health conditions to come forward for flu vaccination.

Those eligible should speak to their GP or practice nurse, or alternatively their local pharmacist, to book a vaccination appointment. For pregnant women, the vaccine may also be available through maternity services.

UKHSA urges vaccination against respiratory viruses ahead of winter

On 25th September, the UK Health Security Agency urged people to book their vaccinations against flu, COVID-19 and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) as cases are starting to increase ahead of the winter.

To ensure people are protected ahead of the peak respiratory illness season, UKHSA is highlighting the importance of taking up the free NHS offer as soon as you are invited for vaccination. Pregnant women and millions of children have already been able to get vaccinated, with appointments for most eligible groups available from 1 October.

For the first time this year, in addition to other eligible groups, toddlers can also get their flu vaccination, which is given as a nasal spray, at community pharmacies.

To encourage higher uptake this winter, the government has this week also launched a new vaccination communications campaign advising people of the steps they can take to protect themselves against flu this winter – the ‘Stay Strong. Get Vaccinated’ campaign developed by the Department of Health and Social Care, with UKHSA and NHS England.

Councils are encouraged to share this information as appropriate.

National Booking Service:

<https://www.nhs.uk/nhs-services/vaccination-and-booking-services/book-covid-19-vaccination/>

*Adrienne Marriott
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30/09/25*