

DISTRICT COUNCILLOR REPORT APRIL 26

Local Government Reform Decision: Three Councils for Suffolk

On Wednesday 25th March we heard that the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government had announced that Suffolk would have three unitary councils. These would replace Suffolk County Council and the five district and borough authorities: Babergh, Mid Suffolk, East Suffolk, Ipswich and West Suffolk. The new councils will come into operation in April 2028. Ahead of this, elections scheduled for next year will establish three shadow authorities responsible for guiding, shaping and overseeing the transition within their respective geography.

In the meantime preparations are going ahead for the Suffolk County Council Elections which are, after all, going to be held this May. The pre-election period began on Friday 28th March after which there would be restrictions on some council activities, in particular regarding publicity and use of council resources during a period of heightened political sensitivity.

Mid Suffolk Culture Fund

Ten organisations in Mid Suffolk have been awarded a share of nearly £120,000 through this fund. The grants support people of all ages, including youth art festivals, intergenerational music and dementia-friendly dance workshops.

The Stowmarket Culture Group will receive £15,000 for its Jubilant Youth summer arts festival whilst more than £8,000 has been awarded to Orchestras Live to support an intergenerational orchestral project in Eye and nearby areas. Wingfield Barns will use £12,000 to

host four-day Easter drama workshops. Other beneficiaries include the East Anglian Traditional Music Trust and the Association for Suffolk Museums.

The next application round will open this autumn for the 2027/28 cycle, with £110,000 available.

Former Council Office Site Sold

Mid Suffolk District Council has sold the remainder of its former office site in Needham Market to Hatch Homes. The deal will see the completion of the site's regeneration, as well as realising funds for reinvestment into council housing.

The transformation of the first part of the site was successfully completed by the council and created 32 homes, including affordable housing, as well as a new retail unit which the Co-op moved into in 2023. Hatch homes will now be delivering the second phase of the project which will include 48 homes for the open market and the redevelopment of grade II listed Hurstlea House into apartments.

Work is expected to begin on site during March, with completion expected by 2029.

Food waste action week 2026

This year, the UK's annual food waste reduction campaign runs from 9 – 15 March and the theme is 'Make Your Food Go Further: for your pocket, for our planet'.

<https://www.wrap.ngo/take-action/love-food-hate-waste/food-waste-action-week>

The week inspires simple, practical action that helps food go further – saving money, time and stress, while protecting the planet.

By preventing food waste, using up leftovers, and recycling anything that can't be eaten, we can unlock more value from the food we already have by helping it to stretch further.

The Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP) is giving tips to make food go further on each day of Food Waste Action Week.

Voter information resources for the May elections

The Electoral Commission has produced a suite of resources that councils and civil society partners can use to help provide voters with the information they need to cast their vote with confidence in the upcoming elections in England on 7 May.

The Electoral Commission has updated its digital and print static resources which councils can use to raise awareness of:

- ways to vote
- when the elections are happening
- finding your polling station
- getting help at the polling station
- what to do if you need help to vote
- polling station opening times
- respecting polling station staff

The voter information resources for use in England includes posters, email signatures and social media graphics.

<https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/resources/democratic-engagement-resources/partner-resources-may-2026-elections-england>

Pride in Place Strategy funding announced

On 21 March, The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government announced £319 million of government funding to help communities to restore pride and opportunity in neighbourhoods:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/high-streets-revived-and-children-given-safe-places-to-play>

The investment is delivered through four strands:

- High streets reinvigorated – £301 million High Streets Innovation Partnerships programme to help support local communities to revive high streets
- Safe places for children to play – £18 million of government funding to buy new and improve playgrounds
- Local progress accelerated – Plans are also moving forward for areas in the first phase of Pride in Place, providing communities with up to £20 million over 10 years
- Tearing up the rulebook on public spending – Five projects will test a new initiative to get local agencies such as councils, the NHS and schools to pool their cash and work together instead of operating in silos

Government review into park homes commission charge

On 5th March, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government launched a review of the 10% commission fee charged on the sale of park homes:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/calls-for-evidence/park-homes-reasons-for-commission-payments>

The Mobile Homes Act 1983 requires park home residents to pay a site owner a commission of up to 10% of the sale price of their home.

The call for evidence will seek to establish:

- The reasons given initially for charging a commission
- What the commission pays for and how it is calculated
- How the commission is linked to other aspects of the Mobile Homes Act 1983
- A better understanding of the sector's business model

The consultation closes on 29 May. If you have any questions, please contact: parkhomes@communities.gov.uk

Press release:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-review-launched-into-park-homes-commission-charge>

The Renters' Rights Act Information Sheet 2026

It's a six-week countdown until the Renters' Rights Act takes effect and improves the lives of private renters in England.

On 20 March, MHCLG published a Renters' Rights Act Information Sheet 2026:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/69bc04b8f7b1c24d8e23ce60/The_Renters_Rights_Act_Information_Sheet_2026.pdf

to give tenants helpful, practical advice on each of the changes and what it means for their tenancy agreement.

It simply breaks down the key information that renters need to know – from stronger protections against rent increases to better rights to request pets – and scrapping Section 21 evictions, fixed-term assured tenancies and more.

Tenants won't need to do anything but read the information carefully. Landlords and their letting agents must legally give this information to tenants by 31 May to avoid risking a fine.

Landlords can give this information to tenants as a hard copy or attached electronically as a PDF to an email.

Public health update

Individuals eligible for free shingles vaccine urged to come forward

On 26 February, the UK Health Security Agency (UKSA) highlighted that fewer than half of adults are taking up their free shingles vaccine in the first year of being eligible.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/millions-eligible-for-free-shingles-vaccine-urged-to-come-forward>

Shingles is a painful condition caused by reactivation of the chickenpox virus. It can cause weeks of severe pain and long-term complications including nerve damage.

The Shingrix For All immunisation programme began on 1 September 2023. The programme offers two doses of the Shingrix vaccine to all immunocompetent individuals turning 65 or 70, and severely immunosuppressed individuals turning 18 and over.

Eligible people can check if they qualify and book their vaccine through their GP or by visiting NHS.uk. More information can be found on UKSA's shingles blog page.

<https://ukhsa.blog.gov.uk/tag/shingles/>

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31/03/26*