

DISTRICT COUNCILLOR REPORT FEBRUARY 26

Councils support Ipswich ambition to be City of Culture

Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils are backing Ipswich's bid to become City of Culture 2029 – saying it deserves Suffolk-wide support. Cllr Andy Mellon, Mid Suffolk District Council Leader said “Mid Suffolk has many residents who work in the town and use its facilities...so we can show the bid has wider support”. He went on to say that putting a bid together would have a huge positive effect on Ipswich, bringing cultural partners around the table and sparking new ideas and collaborations towards a shared vision of the future.

Boosting biodiversity by funding nature in your neighbourhood

Local groups are being urged to apply for new funding from Mid Suffolk District Council, designed to connect people with nature and restore natural habitats within communities. Mid Suffolk's new Community Nature Recovery Fund was launched on 20th January. It will offer up to £50K for projects that protect and expand wildlife corridors and habitats within the district. One application can be made per project, per year and the deadline for applications for the first round of funding is Monday 16th March. To find out more details or to submit an application, visit the Mid Suffolk District Council Community Funding page.

Helping households to save money, eat well and reduce food waste

Households across Suffolk can now get free access to Five Dinners – an award-winning meal planner which helps them eat healthily, save money and reduce food waste. Feel Good Suffolk – a collaboration

between all Suffolk's local authorities and NHS partners – provides free support to residents who want to manage their weight, get more active and stop smoking. The service has team with FiveDinners.com – the online platform founded by TV chef and author Theo Michaels. Households across the county will receive free premium access to this platform for a year after visiting <https://FiveDinners.com/MyCommunity>.

Once registered they will receive a meal plan every week, tailored to their needs and preferences.

Councils call for urgent reform of sewage sludge regulations

Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils are calling for urgent action by the Government to tighten regulations governing the spreading of sewage sludge on agricultural land, citing serious concerns for public health, farming and the environment. Evidence has shown the presence of “forever chemicals”, microplastics, pharmaceuticals and hormone-disrupting substances in the sludge, many of which are not routinely tested. At their January full Council meetings members supported writing to the Secretary of State at the Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra).

Find out how much heat your home is losing – by borrowing a thermal camera for free

Suffolk residents can now borrow a thermal camera from their local library for free to detect where heat is escaping their homes and take action to stop the leaks. Sustainable Suffolk and the Suffolk Climate Change Partnership (including Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils) have previously loaned out thermal cameras to community groups through their project called Keep the Heat. Since 2022, over 153 community groups have taken part in this project, surveying almost 2000 homes across Suffolk. An extension of this project now

enables Suffolk residents over 18, who are library members to collect a camera from Ipswich County Library as one would collect a book.

New local powers to keep pavements clear

On 8 January, the Department for Transport announced new local powers to be made available to local leaders in England to introduce pavement parking restrictions in their area, helping keep them clear and accessible for everyone who uses them, while allowing exemptions where needed

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-local-powers-to-keep-pavements-clear-for-those-who-rely-on-them-most>.

Following a public consultation, the Department for Transport has confirmed that local leaders will be given new and improved legal powers to make it easier to restrict pavement parking across wider areas, rather than relying on the previous approach, where action is often limited to individual streets and requires lengthy, complex processes.

Under the new approach, local leaders will be able to decide to take action on pavement parking whilst retaining flexibility where they deem pavement parking may still be acceptable.

The department will set out guidance to help councils use these powers in a proportionate and locally appropriate way later in 2026.

Hospices in England to receive additional funding

On 7 January, the Minister of State for Care, Stephen Kinnock MP, announced that hospices in England will receive an additional £25 million in capital funding at a Select Committee on Palliative Care.

<https://committees.parliament.uk/event/26150/formal-meeting-oral-evidence-session/>

The funding will upgrade over 170 hospices, including urgent repairs, improved facilities and patient rooms, enhanced outdoor spaces, and better IT equipment.

Disabled Facilities Grant additional funding announced

On 10 January, the Department of Health and Social Care announced an additional £50 million of government funding to help more older people and people with disabilities adapt their homes to live independently.

The additional funding for the Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) in 2025-26 could support around 5,000 more people to install vital home adaptations such as stairlifts, ramps, accessible bathrooms and assistive technologies. These assistive technologies include automatic door openers, lifts, height adjustable surfaces, ceiling track hoists, and smart technology for light and heat.

The DFG supports around 60,000 older people and people with disabilities each year, with an average grant of around £10,000.

The funding will be allocated to councils in February and brings total DFG funding for 2025 to 2026 to £761 million.

Disability Confident scheme overhauled to improve workplace standards for disabled people

On 15th January the Department for Work and Pensions announced that sick and disabled people will have more opportunities to move into work, following the overhaul of the Disability Confident Scheme.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/disability-confident-scheme-overhauled-to-boost-workplace-standards-for-disabled-people>

While around two thirds of employers agree that joining the scheme had a positive impact on their organisation, the Keep Britain Working review

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/keep-britain-working-review-final-report/keep-britain-working-final-report>

by Sir Charlie Mayfield published in November 2025 concluded that while it has many positive aspects it “lacks teeth”.

In response to the review, the government is overhauling the ‘Disability Confident’ scheme to help prevent ill-health, support people to stay in work, and help employers build healthier, more resilient workplaces.

The reforms are aimed at making employers’ experience on the scheme more meaningful and more impactful on their organisations, incentivising them to progress their Disability Confident status and make their workplaces inclusive of disabled talent.

Letter from Minister of State for Housing and Planning to the Planning Inspectorate: Modifying planning obligations

On 18 December 2025, the Minister of State for Housing and Planning wrote to the Planning Inspectorate about the clarification the government has provided to local planning authorities and developers regarding the use of Section 73 applications.

www.gov.uk/government/publications/letter-from-minister-of-state-for-housing-and-planning-to-the-planning-inspectorate-modifying-planning-obligations

A Section 73 application under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 is used to vary or remove conditions attached to an existing planning permission. It allows for "minor material amendments" to a development—such as changing approved plans, opening hours, or materials—without submitting a completely new application. It results in a new, independent planning permission alongside the original. The new government guidelines are “to accelerate growth and housing delivery”.

Consultation on updates to consumer standards and requirements

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government has already consulted on Competence and Conduct and Social Tenant Access to Information. On 9th December a further consultation was launched by the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) to include tenant satisfaction measures and the introduction of new tenant satisfaction measures on electrical safety checks.

The Competence and Conduct requirements are aimed at driving greater professionalism and higher standards by ensuring relevant housing staff have the required skills, knowledge, experience, and behaviours to deliver a high standard of service to tenants.

Senior housing managers and executives will also be required to hold, or be working towards, a housing management qualification. RSH’s consultation also sets out how it proposes to implement a new tenant satisfaction measure covering electrical safety checks.

The consultation closes at 6:30pm on 3 March.

New design guidance for new build developments

On 21 January, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government published an updated new build design guidance:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-design-guidance-to-raise-the-bar-for-new-build-developments>

setting a benchmark for well-designed neighbourhoods, ensuring new developments are well-connected to local shops and services.

The guidance sets out how new homes should reflect modern life – from space to work from home to flexible layouts that adapt as families grow and cater for every stage of life.

Working together, councils and developers will use the guidance to make visible improvements for residents, including calmer streets with less traffic to improved green spaces. New builds will be expected to address and adapt to climate change, creating adequate shade and minimising potential flood risk.

The government is intending to create model design codes – set to be launched later this year – with clear rules to create successful places.

Councils will set the vision for their areas through local plans, ensuring clear design expectations using masterplans, local design codes and guides.

New social and affordable housing package unveiled

On 28th January the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government unveiled new measures to give councils, housing associations and other providers greater financial support to help increase construction of new homes.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/thousands-more-families-to-get-warm-secure-social-homes>

Landlords will also have to meet robust standards to provide homes that are warm and energy efficient and free of disrepair and damp through a new Decent Homes Standard (DHS), updating decency standards for the first time in 20 years.

This is on top of new requirements to upgrade properties under new Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards that could save social tenants money on their energy bills.

The latest update comes ahead of bidding opening next month for the £39 billion Social and Affordable Homes Programme.

The government will work with providers, councils, and developers to agree a framework to get the Section 106 market moving again.

The government has also announced the process to agree a compact with the social housing sector, urging all providers to come forward with ambitious pledges to increase housing supply. A new social housing taskforce, made up of key experts, will hold the sector to account on delivering new homes.

Other measures include:

- Making £2.5 billion in loans available to private registered providers of social housing at just 0.1% interest.
- Allocating an extra £3.5 million through the Council Housebuilding Support Fund for councils to draw up plans for more council homes.
- Increasing the Housing Revenue Account threshold – a ringfenced account for income and spending on councils' own housing stock – from 200 to 1,000 homes.

- Extending the discounted borrowing rate for council housebuilding from the government's lending facility, the Public Works Loan Board.
- Confirming how social rent convergence will be implemented so providers can bring rents that are currently below the government's formula up to that level over time.

Government launches Warm Homes Plan

On 20th January, the government launched the Warm Homes Plan to help families across the country see lower energy bills.

The Plan will deliver £15 billion of public investment, roll out upgrades to up to five million homes that could help save them hundreds on energy bills.

The Plan will target help at low-income families, alongside a universal offer, to ensure that families can feel the benefits of products that can cut their bills.

Alongside this, the Plan will support consumer choice for all households, so people can choose the technologies that work for them as and when they want. Homeowners will be able to apply for government-backed, low and zero interest loans to install solar panels.

Furthermore on 29 January, the government announced the extension of the Warm Home Discount through to 2031

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/energy-bill-support-extended-for-millions-of-families>

providing eligible households with a £150 rebate on their energy bills.

COVID-19 Day of Reflection 2026

The COVID-19 Day of Reflection:

<https://dayofreflection.campaign.gov.uk/>

takes place on 8 March. Events and activities can take place in the week before and surrounding days.

Last year over 200 events were added to the Department for Culture, Media and Sport's (DCMS) map, including almost 50 council-led events. We saw how important the day was for those involved. It is an opportunity to remember lives lost, reflect on the sacrifices made by many, recognise many are still feeling the impact of the pandemic, and pay tribute to all key workers and volunteers.

There are many ways to get involved – providing an opportunity for people to share their reflections or promoting local spaces for reflection or events. Councils may wish to make use of information on the campaign website which includes education resources including stories from the pandemic, a toolkit and more.

Councils can submit events and activities in their area to show how they are getting involved. For any questions please contact: covid.commemoration@dcms.gov.uk

Mobile homes: Fit and proper person test re-application starts on 1 August

MHCLG is reminding councils that the fit and proper person test re-application process will commence on 1 August. Councils must be prepared to receive and assess applications from site owners by that date.

A fit and proper person test for those operating land as a residential park (mobile) home site was introduced on 1 October 2021. All park home site owners were required to apply by that

date, for themselves or the person appointed to manage the site, to be assessed and placed on a local fit and proper person register. A person can be placed on a register for up to five years, after which they must apply to the council to be re-assessed.

Guidance for councils on implementation of the fit and proper person test and setting a fee policy is available on gov.uk.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/mobile-homes-fit-and-proper-person-test-guidance-for-local-authorities>

Further information about the re-application process will be published shortly. If you have any questions, please contact: parkhomes@communities.gov.uk

Public health update

Norovirus cases still rising but overall trend decreasing

On 29 January, the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) reminded people of the steps they can take to halt the spread of norovirus:

Latest data shows that cases have increased 18.3% in the last two weeks, compared to the previous two-week period. While older people continue to account for most cases of the vomiting bug, activity has also increased in children under the age of five in recent weeks.

Common symptoms of norovirus include:

- nausea and vomiting
- diarrhoea
- high temperature
- abdominal pain
- aching limbs

Good hand hygiene is important to stop norovirus spreading. To stop norovirus spreading, you should:

- wash your hands thoroughly using soap and warm water after using the toilet or contact with a sick individual and before preparing and eating food
- stay off school or work until you have not been sick or had diarrhoea for at least 2 days
- not rely on alcohol gels instead of washing your hands, as these do not kill the virus
- wash any contaminated clothing or bedding using detergent at 60°C using disposable gloves to handle any items
- use bleach-based cleaners to disinfect surfaces

If you catch norovirus, stay home for 48 hours after your symptoms clear.

UKHSA has a poster available explaining norovirus, its symptoms, how to prevent it from spreading and details on recovery:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/stop-norovirus-spreading-this-winter-leaflet>

as a PDF to download, print and display.

Councils are encouraged to share this information as appropriate.

Respiratory syncytial virus vaccination for older adults: expansion of eligibility

From 1 April, the eligibility criteria for the programme will change to allow people aged 80 years and over, and all residents in care homes for older adults, to receive the RSV vaccine on the NHS.

*Adrienne Marriott
Blakenham District Councillor
03/02/26*