

DISTRICT COUNCILLOR REPORT MAY 26

Local Elections: 7 May

On Thursday 7th May, polls across the county will be open from 7 a.m. to 10 p.m. for residents to vote in local elections. In Mid Suffolk, residents will be able to vote for their next Suffolk County Councillor. Results will be promoted by Suffolk County Council on their website and social media channels. In the meantime, relevant information remains on Mid Suffolk District Council website and on their Facebook page.

New Recycling Collections in Suffolk

From 8th May onwards, residents will begin to receive an information pack which includes details on what items can be put in each of their bins in preparation for the new service starting on 1st June. There are digital versions of the information packs on the Suffolk Recycles website.

Port One Legacy Biodiversity Enhancement Fund

The deadline for Mid Suffolk District Council's Port One Legacy Biodiversity Enhancement Fund has been extended until the end of June.

Community groups that apply for the fund can use it for projects that enhance biodiversity, improve habitats, support community gardens and much more. Details of how to apply can be found on MSDC's community funding page.

Managing the Risk of Fraud and Corruption

One of the items discussed at the last Joint Audit and Standards Committee (JASC) meeting of MSDC was their annual report on managing fraud and corruption. Internal Audit look at this under the new Global Internal Audit Standards. They have produced a Fraud Risk Register which contains a list of areas where they and Heads of Service believe the councils are susceptible to fraud.

Work on raising fraud awareness is to be furthered through a series of presentations to all Heads of Service and staff responsible for financial transactions undertake a compulsory online e-learning module.

Members of the JASC, including myself, have been offered training on “Countering Fraud and Corruption in Babergh and Mid Suffolk Councils”, to be given by the Head of Internal Audit and a Senior Auditor.

Mid Suffolk Youth Council

A standard letter has been composed and sent out to eight high schools chosen to participate in the scheme and was signed by Keith Scarff, Chair of Mid Suffolk District Council. It informs participants that the Youth Council will meet three times a year, once per academic term. These meetings will be half-day sessions, to be held in person at Endeavour House and they are scheduled to begin in October 2026. Currently positive responses have been received from six of the eight, i.e.

Claydon, Debenham, Finsborough, Hartismere, Stowupland and Thurston.

No response has been received from Stowmarket and Stradbroke has declined to participate.

Each school is asked to elect three students to participate in the Youth Council. These students should be of varying ages and show an interest in community involvement, leadership and taking action. Students on the council should work collaboratively with other students across Mid Suffolk, represent their peers and share their perspectives and ideas. They will be able to develop communication and problem-solving skills and influence and contribute to local policy and community initiatives.

Code of Conduct and a Safeguarding policies are currently in draft form.

English Devolution Bill receives Royal Assent

On 29th April, the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill received Royal Assent:

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/4002>

The Act will introduce new measures to expand devolution and empower mayors and local people. A new Community Right to Buy will give local people the first right of refusal for valued community assets such as shops and community centres when they are put up for sale.

Beyond making changes for communities and high streets, the Act introduces 'Strategic Authorities' into law, to make it quicker to devolve powers out from Whitehall. Strategic Authorities with elected Mayors will receive more devolved powers over transport, planning, housing, and economic regeneration.

The Act also establishes Local Scrutiny Committees for mayoral authorities, which will provide scrutiny of local public spending and decision making.

Further measures in the Act include:

- Mandating Mayoral Strategic Authorities to develop local growth plans, aligning regional economic strategies with national policy
- A new bespoke duty for Mayors and Strategic Authorities to ensure they formally consider local health improvement and health inequalities when making policy decisions
- New powers for Mayors to intervene in planning applications of potential strategic importance, make mayoral

development orders and charge a mayoral community infrastructure levy on developers

- The establishment of the Local Audit Office to help manage council finances, ensuring auditing is carried out more efficiently and transparently

Publication of the ‘Improving Energy Efficiency of Socially Rented Homes in England’ Government Response and Impact Assessment

On 1st April, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) published the government response and impact assessment to the ‘Improving energy efficiency of socially rented homes in England’ consultation, which ran from 2 July to 12 September 2025. It sets out the ambition to give tenants warmer, safer homes that are damp and mould free.

The response also sets out the new Minimum Energy Efficiency Standard for the social rented sector (SRS MEES), which will form part of criterion D of the updated Decent Homes Standard.

The government response builds on the information announced in January in the Decent Homes Standard policy statement, in particular saying more about how the £10,000 spend exemption will work.

Further guidance will be published about Social Rented Sector Minimum Energy Efficiency Standard and the wider Decent Homes Standard to support implementation. As a first step, the government would like to gather questions to inform development. Questions can be sent to decenthomesreview@communities.gov.uk.

Changes to local planning applications

From 1 April 2026, the government are introducing changes to the planning appeal process

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/simpler-faster-planning-appeals-are-coming>

Under the new process, the majority of written representation appeals will accept only the evidence put before the local planning authority during application. This will not only speed up appeals but will also, importantly, encourage a full body of evidence to be provided at application stage, giving local planning authorities the information they need to make decisions – aligning with universal planning principles of keeping decisions local.

Appellants will be able to indicate which procedure they consider most appropriate, along with their reasoning, during the appeal process.

The procedure (written representation, hearing or inquiry) that an appeal follows, is decided by the Planning Inspectorate using the same criteria as before.

For further details about the process, there is a new procedural guide:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/planning-appeals-procedural-guide-for-appeals-relating-to-applications-dated-on-or-after-1-april-2026>

As this only applies to applications made from 1 April 2026, both the current and updated procedures guides will be maintained until the current guidance is no longer relevant.

Reminder: Waste Crime Action Plan launched

On 20 March, the government announced a package of measures targeting illegal dumping.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-cracks-down-on-waste-crime-to-clean-up-streets-and-restore-pride-in-communities>

The new Waste Crime Action Plan

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/waste-crime-action-plan>

sets out a zero-tolerance approach, with action to prevent waste crime at its source by closing loopholes and equipping regulators with the tools they need to stop waste criminals.

Under the plans, the government will expand enforcement activity to punish offenders committing waste crime, backed by £45 million of government funding over the next three years.

Right to Buy: guide for councils updated

On 8th April, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) updated the Right to Buy guide for councils:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/right-to-buy-a-guide-for-local-authorities>

Maximum cash discounts are now £16,000 to £38,000. The level of the maximum discount available depends on where a tenant lives. This can be set against the situation for applications received before 21 November 2024 where maximum discounts were £102,400 across England.

This guide is intended to provide practitioners with information and good practice, advice and tips on the operation of the Right to Buy scheme. It sets out the Right to Buy legislation as a guide. It is not intended to be a definitive interpretation of legislation.

Reminder: Guidance to support councils tackle litter

On 3 March, the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs published updated guidance giving councils clear direction and stronger legal powers to clamp down on serious and persistent litter louts.

Under the rules, councils have the power to issue on-the-spot fines of up to £500 for littering, including when litter is thrown from a vehicle. Unpaid fines double after 28 days, and if the offender can't be identified, the owner of the vehicle will be held to account. The new statutory litter enforcement guidance will help ensure all councils apply the same rules:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/litter-enforcement-powers-when-and-how-to-use-them>

The government has already given councils further powers to clean up Britain's streets, with new guidance on how to seize vehicles used to dump waste also published recently.

Councils will also work more closely with the police to identify, seize and crush vehicles – utilising new technology, such as drones and mobile CCTV cameras, to ensure cars and vans belonging to fly-tippers are identified and destroyed.

Public health update

UKHSA tick awareness campaign 2026

The UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) has launched its annual tick awareness campaign for 2026. The campaign runs throughout the

spring and summer months when ticks are most active and more of us spend time outdoors.

The campaign aims to increase awareness of where ticks are found and how to remove them safely and quickly, as some tick bites can result in infections such as Lyme disease.

To support stakeholders promote tick awareness this year, UKHSA has updated its campaign communications toolkit.

It contains background information, key messages of the campaign, key behaviours for the public to follow, social media materials, suggested social media copy and links to useful information.

UK launches first bird flu vaccine trial

On April 22nd, the National Institute for Health and Care Research announced the first UK does in a new trial using a vaccine to protect against influenza pandemics such as bird flu:

<https://www.nihr.ac.uk/news/bird-flu-vaccine-trial-launches-prepare-potential-pandemic>

The phase three trial will involve around 4,000 adults, including 3,000 in the UK. It will test the safety of the vaccine and how well it protects against flu viruses.

This work will help the UK prepare for future pandemics.

*Adrienne Marriott
Blakenham District Councillor
05/05/26*