DISTRICT COUNCILLOR REPORT OCTOBER 2026

Council reaction to government withdrawing Suffolk from LGR

The government have withdrawn the decision to create three new unitary councils in Suffolk “in the light of new legal advice”. The Reform administration in Suffolk County Council had previously announced their intention to hold a judicial review into the process. Councillor Deborah Saw, leader of Babergh District Council remarked that “the only good thing to come out of this sorry situation is how well the Suffolk districts and boroughs have worked together to put forward new ways of working and innovative ideas. This must and will continue.”

Instead of being delayed for another year, District Council elections will now take place in May 2027 based on existing boundaries.

Council objects to changes in planning policies

At September’s full council meeting members agreed that MSDC leader, Andy Mellon, should write to Ministers to express concerns over several recent changes to national planning policy and their impact on communities.

Government funding to support communities to develop Neighbourhood Plans will be ending in 2027 and councillors will no longer be able to “call in” applications within their ward areas to come to the Planning Committee. There is also confusion over new “Spatial Development Strategies”. Due to recent changes to the National Planning and Policy Framework (NPPF) reference to “settlement boundaries” had now been replaced by just “settlements”. Settlements will include any new building not previously encompassed in the settlement boundary, potentially changing the shape of the boundary so that infill developments might become possible. Cllr Mellon felt that this, taken together with changes to terminology within the NPPF could open the door to more speculative development and it was the Council’s job to seek clarification on these issues.

Cllr Andrew Stringer, MSDC's cabinet member for heritage planning and infrastructure felt that democratic processes were at risk due to these new policies and said he hoped the Council's objections would mitigate negative impacts.

Mid Suffolk funding summit: 21 October

In October, local voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise groups are being invited to attend a free funding summit at Debenham Community Centre to learn more about how our grant process works and how they can access funding. The event takes place from 09.15 to 14.30 and a light lunch will be provided. To book contact Community Action Suffolk (https://www.communityactionsuffolk.org.uk/casevent/3926/)

Free classes to help older people improve their balance

Older people in Suffolk are being encouraged to take part in free exercise classes to help improve balance, fitness and flexibility. Delivered by Mid Suffolk, Babergh, East Suffolk District Council and Ipswich Borough Council, the 12-week Strength and Balance programme aims to improve the balance, co-ordination and confidence of residents aged 65 and over who have had a recent fall or who feel unsteady on their feet. These classes are aligned to an evidence-based programme called OTAGO which is a mixture of both strength and balance exercises led by a qualified instructor in a safe space. You are eligible for the programme if you are over 65 and are at risk of falls or have had a fall and are registered with a GP within the Mid Suffolk, Babergh, East Suffolk or Ipswich Council districts.

East of England: Strategic Flood Risk Assessments Levels 1 and 2

Mid Suffolk and Babergh District Councils along with East and West Suffolk District Councils and Ipswich Borough Council are seeking to commission a combined Strategic Flood Risk Assessment which will cover all of Suffolk.

The purpose of this Flood Risk Assessment is to inform the preparation of Local Plans. Each council will be reviewing their local plan and all will be working to similar timetables. The flood risk evidence should inform the location of new development allocations, taking into account the need for significantly increased housing provision as per government policy. It will also inform decision making abut planning applications, particularly large ones.

The time frame for this assessment is from 13th November 2026 to 29th October 2027 with a possible extension to 29th January 2028.

Consultation on giving councils powers to issue conditional cautions to help them tackle fly-tipping

On 20 August, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) launched a consultation seeking views on introducing powers for councils to issue conditional cautions to fly-tipping offenders:

https://consult.defra.gov.uk/fly-tipping-and-litter-policy/conditional-caution-powers-to-local-authorities/

These cautions are one of a range of pre-court community-based sanctions.

Defra is seeking views on how these cautions could be enforced, including whether to prosecute offenders who fail to comply or only partially comply.

Defra would also like your views on any unintended or environmental consequences, and whether alternative measures would be more effective at deterring fly-tipping.

The consultation closes on 16 October. If you have any questions, please contact: cleanupsquads@defra.gov.uk

Council tax disputes: know your rights

On 27 August, the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) issued a report warning that many people are not being told about their right to challenge council tax decisions at the Valuation Tribunal, an independent alternative to a council's own complaints process.

LGSCO has received more than 1,600 council tax complaints last year, many of which could have gone straight to the tribunal. Appeal deadlines are strict, typically one to two months, and pursuing a council complaint instead can mean losing that right entirely, even with a strong case.

Real cases in the report highlight the consequences of not being informed, including a tenant who queried her bill and later found a bailiff at her door, still unaware she had a right to appeal.

Councils are being urged to signpost this option clearly when decisions are made, rather than leaving people to find out too late.

Further information:

https://www.lgo.org.uk/information-centre/news/2026/aug/ombudsman-warns-thousands-may-be-missing-free-way-to-challenge-council-tax-bills

Common Ground Award 2026 to 2027 opens for applications

On 14th September, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) announced that community organisations in England will be able to bid for new funding to help bring people together, create welcoming local spaces and strengthen relationships in their areas:

https://www.gov.uk/government/news/community-groups-invited-to-apply-for-funding-to-bring-people-together

The Common Ground Award, first launched in 2025, opened to a second wave of applicants, backing groups that know their communities best and are already helping people from different backgrounds meet, mix and build trust.

The funding is designed to support projects that encourage understanding between people from different backgrounds and promote community cohesion.

The next round will provide up to £2.5 million in funding, with individual applicants able to bid for between £20,000 and £50,000 to improve the facilities, spaces and equipment that help them continue delivering vital work in their communities.

Groups of organisations working together can also apply for grants of up to £250,000, helping them increase their impact and deliver even more for local communities.

Applications opened on 14 September and close on 12 October. Successful applicants are expected to be notified in December 2026, with payments likely to be made in January 2027.

Reminder: Council Housebuilding Support Fund bidding round

The Council Housebuilding Support Fund will provide £21.8 million of revenue funding between 2026 and 2029 to help councils develop plans for new council homes, strengthen delivery pipelines and accelerate housing delivery.

Delivered with Homes England, CHSF supports eligible early-stage development activity, including feasibility work, site investigations, technical due diligence and pipeline development, helping councils prepare strong bids for the Social and Affordable Homes Programme.

New reforms to bring more long-term empty homes back into use

On 27th September, MHCLG announced reforms to Empty Dwelling Management Orders (EDMOs):

https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-reforms-to-bring-more-long-term-empty-homes-back-into-use--2

supporting councils to bring long-term empty homes back into use and helping ensure existing housing stock is used more effectively.

EDMOs allow councils to take over the management of long-term empty homes and return them to occupation for up to seven years while ownership remains with the property owner.

The changes will reduce the period a property must be empty before it becomes eligible for an EDMO from two years to six months, allowing councils to act sooner where homes have been left vacant and preventing properties from falling into serious disrepair.

The reforms will also streamline the application process by removing evidential requirements relating to issues such as anti-social behaviour or community support for intervention, making it simpler for

local authorities to seek an EDMO through the Residential Property Tribunal.

The government is also exploring further changes to strengthen the EDMO regime and support councils to use the powers more effectively.

Homelessness Code of Guidance updates

On 30th September, key provisions of the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026 came into force, including changes to homelessness legislation that prevents certain care leavers under 25 from being found intentionally homeless.

This reform recognises that care leavers experience disproportionately poor outcomes, and that behaviour leading to their homelessness may be linked to trauma, instability and unmet support needs from their time in care. This will ensure care leavers are not disadvantaged by a system that does not fully account for these factors and reduce their risk of rough sleeping.

The Building Safety Levy

The Building Safety Levy came into force on 1st October 2026 and now applies to new building control applications on eligible new residential developments and eligible purpose-built student accommodation.

The Levy is part of the government's wider approach to ensure industry contributes to the costs of remediating building safety defects, while protecting leaseholders and taxpayers. Revenue raised through the levy will support remediation efforts and help make affected buildings safer for residents.

Councils with building control responsibilities will act as collection agents.

Public health update

Reminder: Eligible students urged to come forward for both doses of the MenB vaccine as soon as possible

The UK Health Security Agency is urging freshers to ensure they are protected with two doses ahead of term starting

https://www.gov.uk/government/news/latest-figures-highlight-ongoing-meningitis-b-risk-for-students

This is really important because students in their first year of university face a risk of meningococcal disease around seven times higher than young people of a similar age who do not go to university.

Young adults, particularly university students, remain at increased risk from meningococcal meningitis and septicaemia, with Meningitis B being responsible for 97% of recent invasive meningococcal disease cases in 15-24-year-olds

The new data, published in the Invasive Meningococcal Disease (IMD) report for England, also shows that MenB was the leading cause of the disease across almost all age groups under 25.

Every eligible student is urged to come forward for both doses of the MenB vaccine as soon as possible, and to be aware of the signs and symptoms of meningitis so they know what to look out for in themselves and their friends.

Flu National Booking System now open – winter toolkit and supporting resources available

The UK Health Security Agency is reminding parents of the importance of vaccination and helping to protect their children against flu:

https://www.gov.uk/government/news/only-around-half-of-primary-school-children-got-their-flu-vaccine-last-year

Children's flu vaccinations are taking place in schools and local immunisation teams will move from school to school with all schools expected to have been offered sessions by late November.

As it's not possible to vaccinate all children at the start of the campaign, getting vaccinated before November will still help protect children before flu usually peaks in December and January. It's best to get vaccinated before flu starts circulating widely.

The NHS National Booking System:

https://www.nhs.uk/nhs-services/vaccination-and-booking-services/book-flu-vaccination/

is now open for pregnant women, children aged 2 and 3, and children in a clinical risk group (aged from 6 months to 17 years) with flu vaccinations starting from 1 September. All other eligible groups – including those aged 65 and over, people with certain long-term health conditions and carers – can also book now, for appointments from 1 October.

Adrienne Marriott
Blakenham District Councillor
5th October, 2026