

DISTRICT COUNCILLOR REPORT SEPTEMBER 2026

Councils' armed forces commitment recognised with silver award

This summer the councils received the Defence Employer Scheme Silver Award. This award is given to organisations that have made tangible changes to their workplace policies and culture, helping to ensure that reservists, cadet force adult volunteers and their families, feel genuinely valued.

The award builds on the 2025 decision by the councils to re-sign the Armed Forces Covenant to see that members of the armed forces community are treated fairly and face no disadvantage as a result of their service.

Councils repeat objection to pylons project

Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils have restated their objections to National Grid's Norwich to Tilbury plan for pylons, calling for them to properly investigate and cost the options for underground power lines and undersea cabling. The project, in its current form would "threaten food production and devastate biodiversity and local tourism".

Despite repeated requests from the councils, no measures had been taken to enable enhanced connectivity, generation and storage capacity for Freeport East at Gateway 14. If a "go-ahead" was to be given despite the councils' objections it was felt that developers should work more closely with councils and local authorities and should enable greater transparency for local communities.

Suffolk residents can get a free proposal to replace ageing heating systems with heat pumps

Over the past few years, energy bills have been unpredictable, but now The Suffolk Councils' Environment Portfolio Holders' Group in partnership with the utilities contractor Switch Together, will enable homeowners to access government grants of up to £9,000 to access and install heat pumps at affordable rates. The group brings together

environmental leads from across local authorities and Suffolk to coordinate climate action and sustainability initiatives.

Under the government's Boiler upgrade Scheme, eligible homeowners in England can receive a grant of £7,500 toward an air source heat pump which could increase to £9,000 for households currently heating with oil or Liquid Petroleum Gas (LPG). The grant is applied for upfront by the installer so residents do not need to claim it back or repay it.

Householders or small business owners will need to hold a valid Energy Performance Certificate. The scheme is not mean-tested and is currently scheduled to run until 31 December 2027.

Changes to Mid Suffolk District Council housing policy

On 11th August the Cabinet reached a unanimous decision to give higher priority for new affordable homes to those with a local connection to a specific village. However, individuals with urgent, critical or serious housing need will continue to take priority over someone with only a village connection. Care leavers under the age of 25, armed forces veterans and those fleeing domestic abuse will be exempt from the new local connection requirements altogether.

Social housing fraud to be tackled

On 8th July the government announced that people illegally subletting social housing will be identified and may be removed from the property, following a new, innovative data-sharing partnership between the Cabinet Office and Airbnb.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/social-housing-fraud-to-be-tackled-under-industry-first-government-partnership-with-airbnb>

Airbnb is the first short-term letting platform to partner with the Cabinet Office to help tackle social housing fraud. The agreement allows councils to check social housing records against Airbnb listings and identify properties being exploited by fraudsters.

Fraudsters can face further punishments including eviction, fines, and up to two years' imprisonment.

Supported housing residents no longer face a drop in income when increasing their working hours

On 6th July the government announced that residents in supported housing and temporary accommodation will no longer face a drop in income when increasing their working hours.

The current system left vulnerable people in supported housing having to choose between staying out of work, or risk losing their housing support, because the work allowance was higher for Universal Credit than it was for Housing Benefit.

The regulations change how Housing Benefit is calculated so it works in the same way as Universal Credit.

The Housing Benefit (Earned Income Disregards) Regulations 2026 laid before parliament yesterday comes into effect on 5 October 2026.

Capacity to Build (2026 to 2029)

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) is investing a further £46 million over 3 years to expand its skills and capacity offer to councils in a re-branded programme – Capacity to Build. Following the success of the £17 million invested in skills and capacity since 2025, Capacity to Build will continue to help councils develop ambitious pipelines, overcome barriers to delivery and strengthen specialist housing capacity.

Capacity to Build is delivered in partnership with Homes England and the Local Government Association (LGA) and will run between April 2026 and March 2029, helping councils to:

Mid Suffolk District Council agree to spend £500,000 to lower community energy bills

On 11th August Mid Suffolk's Cabinet agreed to launch its new Building Resilience and Adaptation through Community Energy (BRACE) programme. The scheme will make £500,000 available across the district to improve energy resilience, lower bills and cut carbon emissions. The money will be split into two pots: the first pot will support organisations in improving specific community buildings whilst the second will be directed towards future opportunities across the district.

New Rough Sleeping Programme announcement

On 19th August the Prime Minister announced the next steps in his national drive to end rough sleeping through the new Rough Sleeping Programme:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/prime-minister-launches-national-drive-to-get-everyone-in-for-christmas>

backed by £442 million, over 3 years.

The Programme will support delivery of the Government's ambition that everyone should have a route off the streets this winter, while providing longer-term accommodation and support for people with the most complex and long-term experiences of rough sleeping.

The Programme combines two elements:

- A 'route off the streets', to ensure every area can make an offer of support or accommodation, so that people sleeping rough have a route off the streets before Christmas this year.
- A settled accommodation and intensive support package, providing longer-term accommodation and wraparound

support for people who have experienced long-term rough sleeping and face the greatest barriers to leaving the streets permanently.

Funding will be delivered through Mayoral Strategic Authorities and local authorities, working with local partners to assess local need and deliver accommodation and support appropriate to their communities.

The published guidance sets out programme objectives, expectations for delivery, eligible expenditure, target cohorts and reporting requirements. Funding allocations have been calculated using published methodologies intended to reflect levels of rough sleeping and local need.

Guidance: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/rough-sleeping-programme>

Pride in Place Programme: Pride in Place

On 12th August the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government published information on how places can draft their Pride in Place Plan, what content to include, and the submission process.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/pride-in-place-programme-pride-in-place-plans-for-phase-2-places/pride-in-place-programme-10-year-vision-content-checklist>

As part of the Pride in Place programme, Neighbourhood Boards must submit a Pride in Place Plan, setting out your area's overarching vision for change over the next 10 years, and how you will deliver it. This is comprised of a:

- 10-year vision: This will form the majority of Pride in Place Plans. It should outline the local community's vision for the future, with a clear plan guided by community engagement for how Neighbourhood Boards will deliver this

change over the next decade. MHCLG has published an updated content checklist for 10-year visions above.

- 4-year investment plan: This is a shorter and more technical form that you will submit to the department, focusing on indicative interventions, payment profiles and declarations. Further details will be published in the autumn, ahead of opening the online portal for plan submission.

A Free bus travel 24/7 for disabled people

Eligible disabled people across England will get free bus travel all day, every day, after the Prime Minister announced earlier this week (Tuesday 18 August) that the government will lift time restrictions on concessionary passes.

From 1 April 2027, people who hold a disabled bus pass can travel on buses for free, no matter the time of day. This extra support will help to open up access to workplaces, education, training, and other opportunities as well as giving people breathing space on the cost of living and putting money back in people's pockets.

This announcement is part of government's wider commitment to better, affordable, reliable buses, including the £2 bus fare cap, free bus travel for kids this summer and giving local leaders control over their buses.

Press release: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/free-bus-travel-247-for-disabled-people-as-prime-minister-takes-further-action-to-ease-cost-of-living>

Toolkit to help local authorities prepare for heat risks

At the end of June the Ministry of Communities, Housing and Local Government was directing local authorities towards resources which would help in protecting lives in severe weather. One of these resources, particularly appropriate to the recent drought conditions was

the Local Authority Risk and Adaptation (LARA) Toolkit: Heat Edition.
<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/heat>

This was designed to help councils understand and respond to the health risks posed by hot temperatures. It provides a simple, structured way to:

- assess preparedness for heat-related health risks, including current areas of strength
- identify gaps and areas for improvement in local plans and services
- a baseline against which you can benchmark future activity and demonstrate progress
- assess approaches to protect at risk groups such as older people, children, and those with health conditions
- plan practical actions guided by national guidance and good practice
- monitor your progress using our dashboard of visualisations

Reminder: “Let’s Save Water” campaign

On 30 June, the Water Efficiency Campaign (WEC) – led by Ofwat and 16 water companies – launched its national behaviour change programme under the brand “Let’s Save Water.”

The Environment Agency has been closely involved in the WEC since its development, providing the evidence base through its National Framework for Water Resources – including the 5 billion litre daily shortfall figure that underpins the campaign’s core narrative.

The campaign’s drought escalation protocols have been agreed with water companies and are coordinated with the National Drought Group. If drought conditions escalate, the campaign will adapt its messaging and activity accordingly in line with those protocols.

Councils are encouraged to share and repost the campaign assets through their own channels.

Campaign website:

<https://letssavewater.com>

Delivery plan to protect 30% of England's land for nature by 2030 published

On 13th July the Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs published a new government 30by30 delivery plan to help take action to protect 30% of England's land for nature by 2030, backed by government funding.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-accelerates-drive-to-protect-30-of-englands-land-for-nature-by-2030>

The plan sets out how the UK will meet the global 30by30 commitment agreed by over 190 countries to help tackle climate change and to halt species extinction.

The plan aims to turn nature recovery from ambition into action through a clear, tiered approach that helps farmers, land managers, protected landscapes teams and local partners identify where land is already delivering for nature, where more can be achieved, and where investment will have the greatest impact.

Local government updates

Wildfire Risk and Prevention

Following the Prime Minister's announcement on the temporary ban on the sale of disposable barbecues today (14 August) and given the ongoing wildfire risk, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) is encouraging councils to continue action to help reduce the risk of wildfires during the ongoing heatwave to protect local communities and the environment.

On 14th August the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government wrote to Local Authority Leaders across England, highlighting ways in which they can help manage the significant wildfire risk facing the country, and thanking them for their work to date.

Some councils may have Public Spaces Protection Orders (PSPOs) in place to restrict activities that cause a fire risk, such as lighting fires, using barbecues or creating a naked flame in public spaces. Councils are encouraged to review existing local measures, including enforcement, and consider whether further action is needed such as amendments and extensions or to consider introducing new PSPOs if they have not already done so.

Public health update

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

The NHS 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
1st September, 2026*