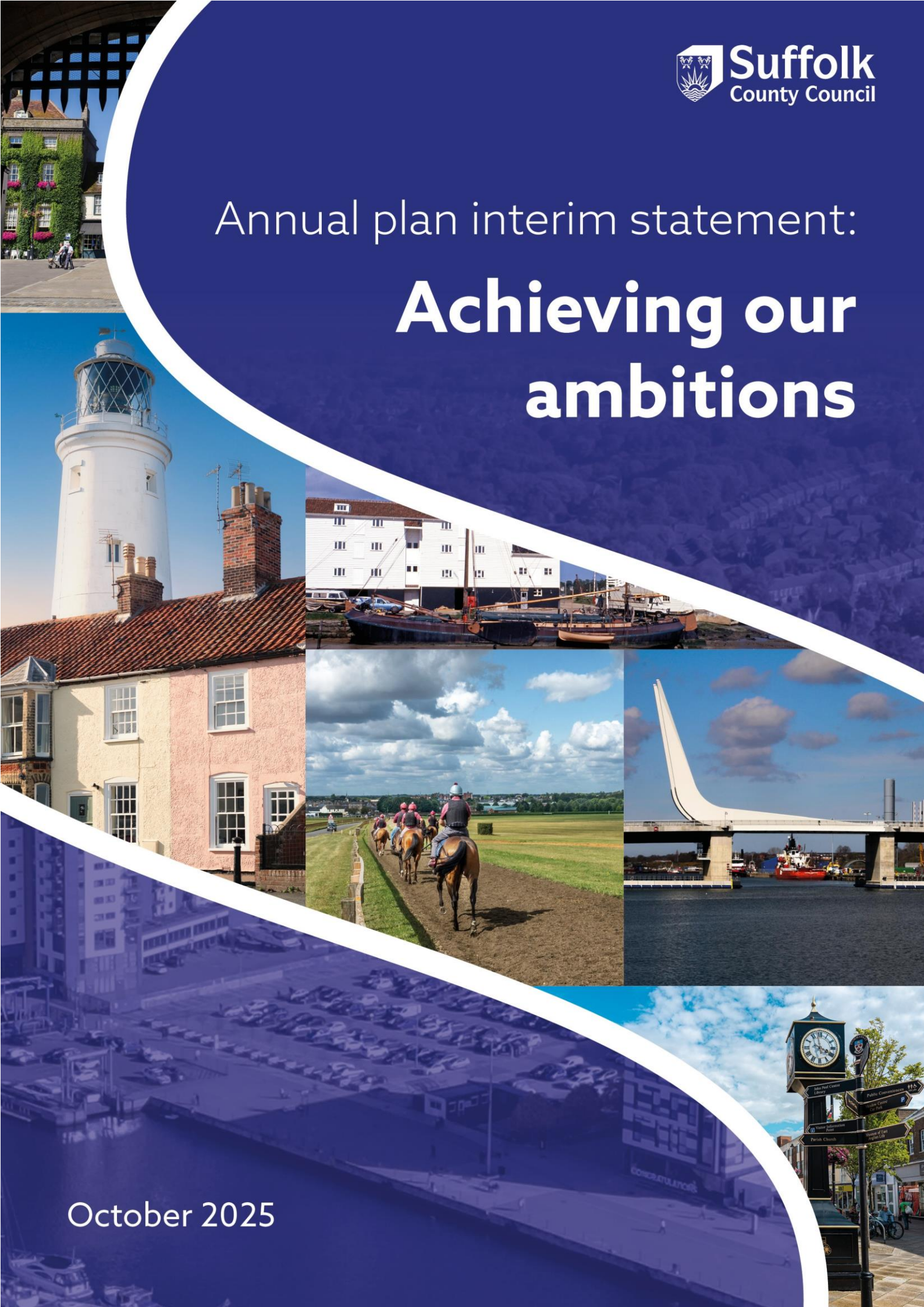


Annual plan interim statement:

Achieving our ambitions



October 2025

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FOREWORDS



Councillor Matthew Hicks

Leader of Suffolk County Council

At Suffolk County Council, we remain firmly committed to supporting our communities, protecting our most vulnerable residents, and investing in the initiatives that will help build a stronger, more connected Suffolk.

This is a pivotal time for our county. In September, we submitted the One Suffolk business case to government, setting out a bold proposal to create a single unitary authority. Our aim is clear: to simplify local governance and deliver better outcomes for everyone in Suffolk. Alongside an incoming new mayor for Norfolk and Suffolk – the landscape for local government is changing.

Should the One Suffolk plan be approved by government, I am confident that the work showcased in this statement will continue and grow. A new, single unitary authority would offer the opportunity to make services smarter, simpler, and better for the people we serve.

Whatever the outcome, our current mission does not change: to lead, support, and deliver meaningful progress for Suffolk. Our guiding ambitions remain constant and underpin everything we do: caring for people's health and wellbeing; growing a strong, inclusive economy; protecting and enhancing our environment; and ensuring value for money for our residents.

Suffolk's strength lies in its communities, and this statement highlights how our work is making a real difference in people's lives.

One major highlight is the official opening of the Gull Wing Bridge in Lowestoft by HRH The Princess Royal in November 2024. Delivered by Suffolk County Council, this engineering achievement is already easing congestion, connecting communities, and drawing new investment into the area.

Elsewhere within the report, you can read about progress in a whole range of areas. This includes investing £3.5 million in new firefighting vehicles and equipment, and an extra £10 million in repairing and resurfacing local roads in villages and residential areas. We have brought libraries back in house to protect this important service for residents, launched our Suffolk Dementia Strategy, and celebrated the work of our nationally recognised Keeping in Touch team, which is transforming modern adoption practices.

Alongside these important initiatives and many more, we are steadfast in our focus on improving infrastructure, transforming public services, and preparing for what could be the most significant change to local government in a generation.

Thank you for taking the time to read this interim statement. I hope it provides a clear picture of the progress we are making and the principles that continue to guide our work. Together, we will shape a better future for everyone in Suffolk.



Nicola Beach

Chief Executive of Suffolk County Council

This is an historic period for Suffolk County Council.

The way council services are delivered is set to be completely overhauled with the process beginning for local government reorganisation. This ultimately means the abolition of the county council and district and borough councils, and the start of the process to create a new unitary council, or councils, delivering all local government services. Plus, we are progressing a devolution deal for Suffolk, which will create a mayor and combined county authority across Suffolk and Norfolk.

Yet, despite these significant strategic programmes happening, our important daily work and delivery of key services must continue. Suffolk County Council remains an ambitious organisation, always looking to improve and adopt best practice for the people of Suffolk.

This means that we remain committed to a very clear set of ambitions:

- Looking after our health and wellbeing
- Strengthening our local economy
- Protecting and enhancing our environment
- Providing value for money for our residents.

I am very proud to present this interim statement. In it, you will find details of some of our achievements and our plans moving forward.

From a new cutting-edge control room for Suffolk Fire and Rescue to repairing more than 22,500 potholes under an extra £10 million highways investment, the scale and variety of what we have delivered is significant. We also continue to make inroads with improvements in our special educational needs and disabilities services, with data evidencing an ever-improving position. This is a particularly challenging area, and we await the highly-anticipated government reforms, but we remain committed to delivering the best services for our children and young people.

These achievements are testament to the hard work of staff, who often work within tight financial constraints, but remain forward-thinking and innovative to deliver the best services for the people of Suffolk. There is not a day that goes by when I don't hear of a colleague going above and beyond or making a true difference to someone's life. These stories are one of the greatest privileges of my job, and I'd like to put on record my thanks to staff, both those within the county council and in our partner organisations.

Things may look very different for Suffolk County Council over the next few years but, in the meantime, we will continue to deliver for our communities across this wonderful county.

SETTING THE SCENE

Uncertainty and change characterise the wider operating context for Suffolk County Council. Geopolitically, instability and conflict set the scene, alongside technological innovation and societal change. Approaching eighteen months into a new UK government, their policy agenda continues to emerge, underpinned by enduring economic challenges including mounting public service spending and sluggish economic growth.

The tough choices facing government were demonstrated in last year's Budget and this year's Spending Review, and are likely to define budgetary matters in the future. In addition, during the summer, government consulted on the Fair Funding Review 2.0, which sets the direction of travel for future funding of local government. It aims to simplify funding and provide more certainty through fewer competitive funding pots and multi-year settlements for councils. However, we await further detail on how proposed changes to the funding formulae and business rates retention will impact Suffolk.

Parliament's summer term saw wider public service reforms. These included the publication of the NHS 10 Year Plan with its commitments to move care from hospitals to communities, prevent rather than just treat illness, and realise the benefits of digital technology. The Plan, as well as structural changes to integrated care boards and an enhanced role for directly elected mayors under the devolution framework, could affect delivery of the council's critical adult and children's social care services to Suffolk's most vulnerable residents.

Additionally, the Modern Industrial Strategy was published in June, setting out government's ambitions for investment in British businesses. It aims to transform high-growth potential sectors, many of which are Suffolk's key economic sectors such as clean energy, financial services, defence, digital and technologies, and creative industries.

This year's Spending Review also trailed a number of wider public policy initiatives, including reforms on special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), strategies on child poverty and youth, a digital and AI roadmap, and a land use framework.

Before the summer Parliamentary recess, the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill was introduced. A key piece of legislation, it sets into statute the devolution framework introduced in the English Devolution White Paper and highlights the need for renewed community empowerment. The Bill, along with the Planning and Infrastructure Bill, which aims to simplify local planning and unlock the government's commitment to build 1.5 million "safe and decent" homes, will introduce new policy requirements for local government.

A significant strategic direction was set for Suffolk County Council when government announced that it was successful in its request to become part of the Devolution Priority Programme. Being part of the programme entails a commitment to deliver local government reorganisation (LGR) and devolution in parallel, to an accelerated timetable, with inaugural mayoral elections scheduled for May 2026. In February 2025, the Local Government Minister issued the formal invitation to Suffolk's councils to submit business case proposals for LGR by 26 September 2025.

Suffolk County Council is working closely with Norfolk County Council, government and local stakeholders to establish the Norfolk and Suffolk Combined County Authority and prepare for the first elections for a directly elected mayor for the area. New powers and funding will flow to the area as a result. These include a 30-year investment fund of £37.4 million a year; adult skills funding; and new powers over transport and infrastructure, housing and strategic planning,

economic development, and employment support. Beyond these powers, the new devolution framework widens the public sector responsibilities of the mayor and the Combined County Authority (CCA). This includes powers around health - including a health inequalities duty and a role for mayors in integrated care boards – and powers around climate change and environmental issues. The mayor will also take on Police and Crime Commissioner and Fire and Rescue Authority functions, providing leadership in public safety policy areas as well. The new mayor will also sit on the Council of Nations and Regions, giving them a strong voice to champion and influence outcomes for Suffolk and Norfolk. Once established and operating effectively, the mayor and CCA will be eligible for further devolved funding and powers.

Simultaneously, Suffolk County Council has been working to develop its business case proposal for local government reorganisation (LGR) – One Suffolk. LGR presents an exciting opportunity to make local government more accessible, efficient and easier to understand. It would see the existing county, district and borough councils across Suffolk replaced by unitary local government where a council is responsible for all local government functions and duties, rather than them being split between different types of council. At the same time, Suffolk's district and borough councils have developed a business case proposal for three smaller unitary councils within Suffolk.

The One Suffolk proposal for a single county unitary designs a new countywide council. Smarter, simpler and better, it would create a more responsive, accessible, engaged and sustainable form of local government. It is a proposal built on extensive engagement with residents and local stakeholders. It proposes new ways to reset relationships with local stakeholders and to empower local communities through resourced local area committees, renewed relationships with town and parish councils, and simpler access to a single council for all local government services.

The business case also demonstrates that a single Suffolk council would be the most efficient and financially resilient form of local government for Suffolk. It shows that, after five years, One Suffolk would deliver £78.2 million of benefit in terms of savings compared to the current local government system in Suffolk, and an annual net benefit of £39.4m from year six onwards. Our business case for one unitary for Suffolk was submitted by the deadline.

A consequence of being on the government's Devolution Priority Programme was that Ministers decided to delay the 2025 county council elections by a year to enable those councils to focus on delivering their LGR and devolution commitments. Therefore, the council's leadership wanted to undertake this review of the county council's Annual Plan ambitions and delivery against them. This is to ensure that, despite the significant change programmes and challenges it faces, the council remains focussed on delivering the best possible outcomes and value for money for Suffolk communities.

This document provides an overview of how the council has delivered against its ambitions and how it proposes to continue delivering on them. Given the extent of change facing the council, there is a commitment to further review the corporate ambitions and their delivery after the end of the financial year in March 2026. This will ensure Suffolk County Council's leaders remain focussed on delivering the best possible outcomes and value for money for Suffolk.

OUR AMBITIONS: LOOKING AFTER OUR HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Promoting and supporting the health and wellbeing of all Suffolk's people is a vital role for the county council. It is at the heart of both the services we provide and our wider roles as a local leader, employer, and owner of assets. This objective relies on our maximising our ability to innovate, adapt and work in partnership with individuals, communities and partners.

While the health and wellbeing of the whole local population is vital, the county council has a particular focus on enabling the most vulnerable Suffolk residents to live as safely, independently, healthily and well as possible.

Promoting and supporting the health and wellbeing of all people in Suffolk encompasses a wide range of activities, including:

- Prioritising children and young people requiring extra support, and protecting those at risk.
- Improving SEND (special educational needs and disabilities) services.
- Supporting adults who require care and support to lead independent and fulfilling lives.
- Supporting good physical and mental health for all people in Suffolk.
- Keeping people in Suffolk safe.

SINCE OUR LAST ANNUAL PLAN, WORK HAS PROGRESSED TO ACHIEVE OUR AMBITION:

1. We have continued to deliver our action plan to strengthen adult social care practice, based on the learning from Suffolk's pilot Care Quality Commission (CQC) assessment. Improvements so far include the launch of a new carers' review process, a system for ensuring safe caseloads, and 'waiting well' guidance to ensure people are supported while awaiting a full social care assessment.
2. A range of supported self-assessment tools have been launched to improve access to adult social care. These include supported self-assessments for adults and carers, with over 1,250 referrals received for each group.
3. We have trialled verified accounts to provide adults and carers with access to their social care record and have granted access to 113 people. We have also introduced webchat with our Customer First advisors, ensuring people contacting adult social care have their queries resolved more quickly.
4. The Suffolk Dementia Strategy was launched in May 2024, during Dementia Awareness Week. It focuses on early diagnosis, better information, and improved signposting to help people with dementia and their carers live well in their communities. An action plan is being delivered to implement the strategy with key partners.
5. Suffolk's Keeping in Touch Team has been recognised as a national leader in the modernising adoption agenda, using a strengths-based approach in supporting adopters and birth families to build sustainable relationships.
6. We continue to work in partnership with school leaders to improve attendance. This has included sharing effective practice between schools and settings. Across the 2024-25 academic year, the rate of improvement in Suffolk has been higher than the national rate of

improvement, and persistent absence in Suffolk has reduced year-on-year. New workstreams have been developed to focus on those children with persistent and severe absence, alongside a focus on children accessing Alternative Provision.

7. An expansion to our SEND (special educational needs and disabilities) Capital Programme was agreed in April 2025 to address the continued pressure on specialist placements. This delivered 150 new places by September 2025, and work is underway to create a further 200 places in academic year 2025/26. The next phase of SEND provision is already in focus, with the development of new proposals within the available budget envelope.
8. In April 2025, Suffolk County Council, on behalf of the wider Suffolk system, launched the updated Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Strategy, which builds on the foundations laid by the county's first VAWG strategy in 2018.
9. Following a procurement process where no viable provider was identified, Suffolk County Council brought the library service back in-house for the first time since 2012. This decision was taken to protect the service from major changes. The successful transition from the external provider into our Public Health and Communities directorate happened on 1 June 2025, with all 45 Libraries remaining open and no changes to opening hours.
10. Following successful procurements, Community Dental Services were awarded contracts to deliver a mobile oral health assessment and treatment service for children and vulnerable adults; and an oral health promotion service, which includes supervised toothbrushing in early years and education settings, training to professionals, and 'Keep Suffolk Smiling' packs for toddlers.
11. We have invested £3.5 million in new firefighting vehicles and equipment, to give our Fire and Rescue Service staff the best tools and technology to keep the residents of Suffolk safe.
12. We have recruited a Trading Standards' Fraud Protect and Prevent Officer, funded by Suffolk Public Sector Leaders group and working in collaboration with Suffolk Constabulary, to help protect and prevent our residents and businesses from becoming victims of fraud and financial abuse.
13. We have been working with a local charity towards the creation of new community facilities and a Care Farm in Haverhill. The proposed scheme will provide space for community services and enrichment opportunities for people with additional needs.

UNTIL THE END OF THE FINANCIAL YEAR 2025/26, WE WILL:

1. Build and test our new adult social care customer relationship management (CRM) database, to ensure we have a record of all contacts people have with adult social care. This will mean our residents only need to tell their story once, and they will have a more joined-up and seamless care and health experience. In the longer term, this system will empower people to manage more of their own needs, reduce pressure on frontline teams, and enable earlier, more effective support.
2. Prepare for our baseline CQC assessment and ensure we have delivered against the priorities in our action plan to improve social care quality. The assessment is expected to take place before the end of the year.
3. Develop a more joined-up and person-centred model for young people transitioning from children's to adult social care, with earlier planning, clearer information for families, and stronger collaboration between children's and adults' services. This work is focused on

ensuring that young people and their carers feel supported, informed, and confident as they move into adulthood.

4. Work with partners to respond to the NHS 10-Year Plan, including its increased focus on neighbourhood health services, to ensure community-based care options continue to be well-integrated and accessible across Suffolk.
5. Implement our Families First approach. Families First focuses on strengthening early intervention, multi-agency child protection, and family networks to improve outcomes for children and families. This new way of working for Children and Young Peoples Services commences in April 2026. With our partners, we are dedicated corporate parents, continuously enhancing our care and support for our children in care and care experienced young people as part of our Families First approach.
6. Develop our Children and Young People's Services transformation plan to launch in Spring 2026. This will detail refreshed strategic and service delivery priorities to direct our transformation and improvement programmes for the next two years.
7. Maintain our focus on the attainment levels for children and young People in Suffolk. Partnership work and co-production activities are ensuring a system-wide response. Upcoming activity includes a planned education conference with all schools in the Suffolk system, to be held in January 2026, and the introduction of new processes focussed on ensuring that fewer vulnerable learners experience a disrupted education.
8. Ensure the continued development of the Suffolk Community Libraries Service, empowering them to become integrated points of support for health information, employment support, digital inclusion, and social connectivity. This will ensure residents receive seamless, joined-up support and resources on their doorstep.
9. Launch the Suffolk Health Information Network (SHINE) website. Co-produced with families and professionals, this website for parents, carers, children and young people will provide a wide range of easily-accessible health information, including interactive activities.
10. Revise the current Suffolk Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) in response to the English Indices of Deprivation 2025, which were published on 30 October 2025.
11. Develop the Feel Good Suffolk digital universal offer to provide more individualised and tailored digital support and ensure we make the best use of resources.
12. Implement the Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service action plan based on the inspection by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services. To deliver the plan, Suffolk County Council's Cabinet has agreed to invest an extra £1.6 million over two years.
13. Further expand the awareness and resilience of our residents, communities and businesses to scams and rogue-trading by increasing the number of followers of our social media alerts; enlarging our network of Trading Standards Champions; building on the number of No Cold Calling Zones in Suffolk; growing and strengthening our SCC-accredited Trusted Trader scheme; and delivering training activities and presentations through our Fraud Protect and Prevent Officer.
14. Work to embed prevention into the specifications and evaluations for our procurements, where appropriate. This means we will focus on ensuring we are buying and commissioning services that will not only help us to deliver value-for-money services in the short term, but also help tackle the longer-term challenges that Suffolk is likely to face.

CASE STUDIES

The launch of Reverie

In early 2025, Suffolk County Council launched **Reverie**, an innovative virtual reality tool co-designed with people living with dementia and funded through an £80,000 Suffolk 2020 Fund investment. Developed in partnership with Spark Emerging Technologies, Reverie offers immersive Suffolk-themed experiences to improve wellbeing and communication in care settings.

Following successful pilots in care homes, day centres, and extra-care schemes, the council plans to extend access across Suffolk in 2025/26, expand the content library, and explore its use in social care assessments.

The project supports Suffolk's Adult Social Care *People at the Heart of Care* ambition, and positions the council as a leader in digital care innovation.

Integrated Neighbourhood Summit

In May 2025, Suffolk held its third Integrated Neighbourhood Summit, bringing together 90 local leaders and professionals to celebrate 10 years of working together through neighbourhood teams. These teams share goals, as well as buildings and management, helping people get more joined-up care in their communities.

The summit addressed the challenges ahead - enhancing personalisation, boosting integration, and delivering proactive care in the community. Good practice from across the county was shared, as well as ideas co-produced with over 80 professionals and 70 people who draw on care and support. National NHS colleagues were impressed by the progress of the Suffolk-wide system and shared insights from elsewhere.

The summit demonstrated how Suffolk is tackling national challenges like shifting care out of hospitals, focusing more on prevention, and using digital tools to support an ageing population with more complex needs.

Connecting to support children, young people and families

The June 2025 Community Inclusion Forum Conference brought together over 160 Special Educational Needs Coordinators, inclusion leaders from mainstream schools, and service colleagues from across Suffolk to deepen collaboration, share inclusive practice, and drive forward meaningful change for children, young people, and families.

Children, young people, and the voices of families were central to the day, from learning about the Multi-Schools Council to a powerful session led by Suffolk Parent Carer Forum. Suffolk SENDIASS (Special Educational Needs and Disability Information Advice and Support Service) were also part of the carousel conversations and shared information and resources about the service. These contributions offered valuable insights, and helped deepen empathy and understanding between professionals and families.

Feedback was overwhelmingly positive, highlighting the event's positive atmosphere, strong organisation, informative content, and valuable networking opportunities. The day was summed up perfectly by one delegate: ***"Today reminded me that we're not alone in this work, and together we can make a real difference."***

New Strategy launched to tackle violence against women and girls

In April 2025, Suffolk County Council, on behalf of the wider Suffolk system, launched the updated Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Strategy.

Significant progress has been made in addressing and preventing abuse since the launch of the county's first VAWG strategy in 2018. Key achievements to date include the establishment of Suffolk's 24/7 domestic abuse helpline, the expansion of safe accommodation for survivors, and the creation of a dedicated Domestic Abuse Perpetrators Unit focused on behavioural change.

Despite this progress, the need for continued, coordinated action remains. Through strong partnership working, Suffolk is committed to driving lasting change. One standout initiative is the Domestic Abuse Champions training programme, which equips individuals across sectors to support victims to safely exit abusive relationships. With over 1,500 trained champions county-wide, the initiative has been nationally recognised by Nicole Jacobs, Domestic Abuse Commissioner for England and Wales.

The 2025–2028 strategy sets out Suffolk's vision for a community in which everyone has a role to play in preventing and responding to VAWG. Developed in collaboration with survivors, professionals, and policymakers, the strategy aligns with emerging national policy, while building on local successes. This strategy recognises that men and boys can also be victims of violence and abuse and, although the focus remains on women and girls, it is important that no victim is overlooked and that appropriate support and services are accessible to them.

300th Suffolk No Cold Calling Zone launch

In September 2025, Suffolk Trading Standards launched the county's 300th No Cold Calling Zone. This covers a residential street in an area of Felixstowe and is part of our scheme to make people feel safer in their homes. This latest zone was implemented due to the profile of its residents and a previous incident of doorstep crime.

A No Cold Calling Zone (NCCZ) is a nominated area where residents state they do not want traders to cold call at their homes. Zones are established in association with residents, councillors, police and other partners. They are set up if they meet criteria such as occurrences of doorstep crime or distraction burglary incidents; a population more susceptible to doorstep crime; and being within a defined geographic area. Residents in the nominated zone area are consulted and, with their agreement, a NCCZ is set up, with information packs, door stickers and street signage provided.

The first zone was launched in Maryon Road and Grasmere Close in Ipswich in 2009 and there are now more than 14,000 properties in Suffolk covered by them, with over 27,000 further homes individually protected by the supply of a No Cold Calling door sticker. Anyone wishing to nominate their road should go to the No Cold Calling page on the Suffolk County Council website.

Lowestoft Healthy Hearts

Lowestoft Healthy Hearts is a two-year, collaborative project led by Suffolk County Council's Public Health team. The project launched in 2024, bringing together the local community and partners (the voluntary sector, NHS, district council, and Health Innovation East) to tackle high blood pressure, a leading cause of heart attacks and strokes. Input from 219 residents, via "Community Voices", shaped the project interventions that are delivered using a three-pillar approach:

- Prevent - a public awareness campaign encouraging people to "know their numbers"; education about healthy behaviours; a dedicated Feel Good Suffolk advisor to support residents with quitting smoking, healthy eating, and exercise; and the creation of "Heart Health Hubs".
- Detect – an innovative digital health check station located in Lowestoft Library, offering free blood pressure checks in the community.
- Protect – supported by an innovative digital tool, Lowestoft GP practices proactively contacted patients identified as having high blood pressure and optimised their medication.

The project has so far delivered over 900 free blood pressure checks, reaching many who had not been checked in over a year, with about 12% recorded as having high blood pressure. Over 865 local people have been referred to Feel Good Suffolk for weight management courses, stop-smoking services, and exercise groups. Local GP surgeries have identified over 2,500 patients with uncontrolled blood pressure. Over 1,700 of these patients now have their blood pressure under control.

The Lowestoft Healthy Hearts project will continue through 2025, with an independent evaluation underway to capture lessons learned and long-term impacts. Its early successes are already influencing how we design health services and demonstrate the council's commitment to improving health and reducing inequalities.

OUR AMBITIONS: STRENGTHENING OUR LOCAL ECONOMY

This objective is focussed on maximising economic opportunities that benefit everyone, so that no one is left behind. A strong economy is vital to ensuring Suffolk's people and places can fulfil their potential, and economic wellbeing has a significant impact on physical and mental health and wellbeing.

We will work with local businesses, communities and other partners to ensure that the Suffolk economy, with its international gateways, connectivity to the UK, and vital key sectors fulfils its potential, and that its residents can contribute to and benefit from that.

SINCE OUR LAST ANNUAL PLAN, WORK HAS PROGRESSED TO ACHIEVE OUR AMBITION:

1. The Gull Wing Bridge in Lowestoft was officially opened by Her Royal Highness The Princess Royal in November 2024. The bridge has improved journey times through the town and better connects communities, helping to spread growth and attract new investment to Lowestoft.
2. Through the extra £10 million investment to repair and resurface local roads in villages and residential areas across Suffolk, we have repaired 22,549 potholes and 3,547 pavements and footpaths, and resurfaced 84 carriageways.
3. We have consulted on and published the Suffolk Local Transport Plan 2025-2040 – the council's overarching framework for transport and travel in Suffolk. The plan, including 15 area plans for the largest settlements in Suffolk, as well as the updated Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan was approved by Cabinet in February 2025.
4. We have continued the development of the £64 million A12 Major Road Network project to support economic growth on the corridor, with the public consultation now complete.
5. We have completed the Strategic Outline Business Case for road safety and traffic flow improvements to the A140 Major Road Network, with three junctions identified as pinch-point areas that may benefit from improvement.
6. In March 2025, Europa Way in Ipswich was formally opened, with the project completed on budget and ahead of schedule. The £2.1 million link road will ease traffic congestion in nearby Bramford and Sproughton, and improve connectivity for sustainable transport modes such as walking and cycling.
7. Feasibility studies have been completed for the Prince Philip Lock pedestrian and cycle bridge, which will complete a circular route around Ipswich Wet Dock and link with established public rights of way. This will help facilitate the wider regeneration of the Ipswich Waterfront.
8. We have continued to develop the active travel projects supported by our £7.9 million of Active Travel England (ATE) funding, with consultations completed for schemes in Ipswich, Woodbridge and Felixstowe. We have secured £2.8 million of additional funding through the Consolidated Active Travel Fund, as well as £1.25 million from East Suffolk Council Community Infrastructure Levy funding toward the Main Road Martlesham Active Travel Scheme.
9. A bike library project, launched at Phoenix St Peter Academy in Lowestoft, has garnered national recognition. Children in years 5 and 6 have been offered free bikes to loan, as well

as Bikeability training to give them the skills and confidence to take their bikes on the road. The project was crowned winner of the best Education in Engagement Project of the Year category at the Modeshift National Sustainable Travel Awards in December 2024. The scheme has since been enlarged.

10. Work has started on our Housing Joint Venture homes at our Newmarket site, with the first homes expected to be completed by the end of 2025.
11. We have continued to work with local partners to ensure that Suffolk fulfils its internationally significant economic potential. Work has started on the building of a new Skills and Innovation Centre at the Gateway 14 Freeport site. Around 1,800 jobs are now committed to Freeport East development sites, with some £250 million in private investment pledged.
12. The Suffolk Business Board was established in May 2024 to take over the role of the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) in providing a voice for business in Suffolk. The Suffolk Economic Strategy was agreed by Cabinet in December 2024.
13. We have continued to work with and influence developers and government departments to ensure that the impacts of Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs) are minimised, and opportunities maximised, through better coordination, improved mitigation, and community benefit schemes. Suffolk County Council has been involved in the examination for Five Estuaries, and prepared relevant representations for North Falls. We have engaged in pre-submission consultations and discussions on Sea Link, LionLink, and Norwich to Tilbury.
14. In June 2025, we ran a national infrastructure conference, funded through private sector sponsorship. Delegates from across the country attended to hear speakers from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), legal experts, and industry leaders discuss the Planning and Infrastructure Bill, effective communication with project promoters, and the importance of local impact reports. The conference further cemented Suffolk County Council's recognised role as a Centre of Excellence for Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs)
15. Suffolk and Norfolk have joined the new national framework of VisitEngland-accredited Local Visitor Economy Partnerships (LVEP), after a successful bid by Visit East of England supported by Suffolk County Council and Norfolk County Council. The LVEP will look to grow the visitor economy, linking local and national priorities, with an emphasis on sustainability and accessibility.
16. We have successfully delivered the first year of our £500,000 Culture Project Fund, with the second year announced in September 2025. This initiative is aimed at strengthening and supporting local arts and museum projects in our local communities across the county.

UNTIL THE END OF THE FINANCIAL YEAR 2025/26, WE WILL:

1. Create a Suffolk Highways cross-contract strategic board to support coordinated works and identify opportunities to enhance our environmental, social value and commercial offer.
2. Continue to develop mini-mobility hubs using existing community resources to offer safe interchange between active travel, community transport and scheduled local bus routes.
3. Continue to review spending on bus and community transport, engaging with communities and operators to develop the most appropriate travel solutions.

4. Develop and publish strategies to support the new Local Transport Plan, including a Road Safety Strategy and a Rural Strategy, and update the Rail Prospectus.
5. Support the council's aspirations and maximise opportunities for Suffolk to benefit from government funding by delivering key infrastructure, including various active travel improvements, and a Safer Roads Fund project for the A1156.
6. Extend delivery of Bikeability training to year 5 and 6 students, recruit a road safety apprentice to develop the Junior Road Safety scheme, and extend e-bike trials across the county.
7. Review the Suffolk Streets Design Guide and Guidance for Parking.
8. Start work on our Housing Joint Venture homes at our West Row site and complete the planning process for other in-scope sites.
9. Obtain approval to start the review of our Minerals and Waste Local Plan, reflecting changes to the planning system, local government reorganisation, and devolution.
10. Grow local business and inward investment activity by implementing a new business grants' programme; supporting the Growth Hub with the Scale-Up Programme and high-growth business support; promoting sectors and sites at national and international events with regional partners e.g. UKREiiF, Global Offshore Wind, and Farnborough; and completing cluster analysis and execution plans to grow sectors.
11. Develop the Suffolk Economic Strategy by agreeing interventions to deliver the strategy with the Suffolk Business Board and engaging with emerging devolution work related to future economic development activity.
12. Work with partners to promote both the importance of the A14 Growth Corridor and the opportunities to maximise economic growth, including Freeport East, AI Growth Zones and Enterprise Zones.
13. Continue to generate income through providing advice and training to other local authorities on Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects.
14. Continue to represent Suffolk's interests on current Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects, which include energy projects such as grid reinforcement, wind farms and solar; and water infrastructure projects such as water recycling and storage.
15. Apply for full archive service reaccreditation, demonstrating our commitment to national standards in managing and delivering the service.
16. Manage the estate and the diversification of business types at Phoenix Enterprise Park in Lowestoft, a site that supports local business growth and job creation. Creating a mix of businesses helps to support the viability of local tenants and strengthen the council's income security.

CASE STUDIES

The Gull Wing bridge open and garnering national attention

The Gull Wing Bridge in Lowestoft opened publicly to pedestrians, cyclists, and vehicles in September 2024, and was formally opened by Her Royal Highness The Princess Royal in November 2024. The rolling bascule bridge is the largest bridge of its kind in the world to date.

By providing a long-awaited third crossing over Lake Lothing, the iconic Gull Wing bridge significantly eases traffic congestion in the town centre, shortening journey times and improving journey reliability. Modern cycle and pedestrian facilities on either side encourage more sustainable modes of transport and better connect communities on the north and south of the waterway.

The bridge has already garnered national recognition. In March 2025, it won the 2025 Bridges Design and Construction Award. In June 2025 it received a 'Highly Commended' honour at the Chartered Institution of Highways & Transportation Awards 2025. The bridge was nominated for the CIHT Infrastructure Award, which recognises exceptional engineering solutions that have delivered creative and resilient infrastructure. The bridge was also shortlisted in the Best Transport Project category for the British Construction and Infrastructure Awards 2025, and received a 'Highly Commended' honour at the ceremony in October.

The bridge is expected to attract new businesses and trade to the area, create new job opportunities, and streamline logistics and transportation - laying the foundation for continued growth in the town and surrounding area for many decades to come.

Bold new vision for Suffolk's future

Suffolk has ambitious plans to position the county as a national leader in sustainable growth and innovation, as set out in the Suffolk Economic Strategy published in January 2025.

Developed with the input of hundreds of leaders from business, local authorities, education, health, and the voluntary sector, the strategy identifies three types of growth opportunities: building on Suffolk's strengths in clean energy, agri-food, and ports and logistics; unlocking emerging opportunities linked to Cambridge and London; and driving value growth in Suffolk's largest employing sectors by improving job quality and productivity.

To unlock these opportunities the strategy sets out five growth enablers – attracting investment, boosting infrastructure and connectivity, driving enterprise and innovation, talent development, and creating pride in place. A golden thread throughout is technology convergence – combining Suffolk's strengths in clean tech, AI, quantum security and satellite applications to create new products, markets, and competitive advantage.

Ultimately, the strategy's goal is to make Suffolk EPIC. The framework to guide investments and funding priorities is built on four key principles - **E**conomic wellbeing, **P**roductivity, **I**nclusivity, and **C**lean growth. These will ensure Suffolk thrives economically, while being environmentally responsible and socially inclusive.

The strategy is underpinned by a comprehensive Investment and Delivery Plan that aims to attract £4 of private investment for every £1 of government economic funding, including a multimillion-pound pipeline of projects to boost productivity, create jobs, and attract new companies and talent to Suffolk.

Good Health @ Work Programme

Healthy employees are the foundation of healthy businesses. In 2023, Suffolk lost up to 2.1 million working days due to sickness absence, costing £432 million in lost productivity.

Launched in November 2024, the Good Health @Work (GH@W) programme recognises, supports, and celebrates small and medium enterprises (SMEs) across Suffolk that want to create a happier, healthier workplace.

The service brings together a wide selection of useful resources that can help make businesses a great place to work. It includes a Navigator Service that provides expert support to help SMEs enhance workplace health and work towards a GH@W Award. An Ambassador Network connects businesses to a community for sharing insights and best practice and mentorship.

In the first six months of delivery, the programme engaged with 192 businesses, with 75 employers going on to undertake a GH@W award.

Orwell Housing Association recently achieved the Gold GH@W Award. The process helped Orwell refresh its Health, Safety and Wellbeing Strategy and update internal guidance. While many employee-led initiatives were already in place, the GH@W Award encouraged a stronger focus on early intervention, particularly around stress, alongside a clearer stance on tackling discrimination. It also reinforced the value of continuing to support employee ideas and feedback as a key part of their approach.

Arts organisations and museums across Suffolk get £500,000 funding boost

The £500,000 Culture Project Fund was launched in 2024 in recognition of the impact that museums and arts organisations have on all four of the county council's ambitions. The aim of the fund is to support an increased number of museum and arts projects across the county.

The fund received 131 applications for medium (up to £15,000) and large (up to £50,000) grants. The level of ambition and creativity shown was inspiring and demonstrated the incredible talent, ambition and commitment that exists across the museums and arts sector.

Grants were awarded to 65 projects. This includes 33 medium and large grants and 32 small (up to £1,500) grants. These projects are delivering exciting museums and arts activities across Suffolk, strengthening creative communities and enhancing public engagement with arts and museums. Many of the activities are carefully designed to engage with younger or older people, families, refugees, people with learning differences, and deaf and disabled people.

Projects being delivered between 1 April 2025 and 30 September 2026 include:

- Silk Music - a creative project in Sudbury for young people to explore the cultural heritage of silk, led by CLIP.
- Next Steps – a series of outdoor, nature-focused activities and community-led surveys of the local natural environment, led by Dunwich Museum.
- Jubilant! 2025 - an annual mini-festival celebrating the creativity of local school children and young people, led by the Stowmarket Culture Group.

The Culture Project Fund is bringing new artistic experiences to local communities, supporting the growth of our creative and tourism industries, and celebrating and protecting Suffolk's rich heritage.

Suffolk Trading Standards Imports Team

The Port of Felixstowe is the largest container seaport where consumer goods enter the UK. The Office for Product Safety & Standards provides grant funding to Suffolk Trading Standards to carry out import surveillance work at the Port, benefiting not just Suffolk, but the whole of the UK.

During the financial year April 2024 to March 2025, over 370,000 consumer goods checked by Suffolk Trading Standards Imports Team at the Port of Felixstowe were refused entry into the UK because they were unsafe or non-compliant. Many were destined for sale on online marketplaces, and many of the importers whose goods were stopped have no physical presence in the UK.

Examples of products stopped include 87,900 toys and products for babies and children; 121,800 household electrical goods; 81,800 lighting products (including fairy or Christmas lights); 27,600 cosmetics; 11,300 e-scooters or other e-transport goods; 24,800 machinery and DIY electrical goods; and 6,300 unsafe or non-compliant ladders. Unsafe products pose a risk of serious injury or death from potential incidents such as choking, suffocation, strangulation, falling, electric shock, and fire; or longer-term health risks such as cancer arising from exposure to toxic substances.

The work of our Suffolk Trading Standards Imports Team to stop unsafe and non-compliant consumer goods at the border reduces the harm caused to people, business, and the economy.

As well as detecting, deterring, and disrupting rogue importer activity, the team also plays an important role in facilitating the movement of goods for compliant importers and reputable businesses, reducing burdens and delays to support the UK economy.

OUR AMBITIONS: PROTECTING AND ENHANCING OUR ENVIRONMENT

Suffolk's natural and historic environment is one of its greatest strengths. It is why so many enjoy living and working in and visiting Suffolk and, therefore, has a vital role in improving health and wellbeing. Suffolk's environment also makes a significant economic contribution, as a leader in green growth with its renewables and technology sectors, as well as its visitor economy.

SINCE OUR LAST ANNUAL PLAN, WORK HAS PROGRESSED TO ACHIEVE OUR AMBITION:

1. In June 2025, our Flood Investigations and Grants team won the Small Team of the Year category at the prestigious Local Government Chronicle Awards. The team was set up in the immediate aftermath of Storm Babet to assist flood victims in applying for funding grants and helping communities get back on their feet. Post Storm Babet, Suffolk has been the most successful area in the country at distributing the available government grant funding with over £600,000 paid to residents to date.
2. We have produced 'Flood Smart Living' - a new guide to support community and homeowner-led action to make locations more resilient to future flooding.
3. In February 2025, Cabinet approved an extra £2.7 million of funding to enable the Benacre flood protection scheme to go ahead. This vital scheme will protect the A12 and surrounding homes near Lowestoft from being flooded regularly.
4. The council has received £7.3 million of funding from the government's Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (LEVI) fund. The fund aims to help local authorities deliver EV charge point facilities for local residents without access to off-street parking. Suffolk County Council is the first local authority in England to award their LEVI funding tender, with the rollout starting this summer.
5. The new Haverhill recycling centre officially opened in August 2024. It is three times bigger than the previous site and has three times more booking slots available.
6. We have continued to roll out waste reduction programmes across the county. These include composting schemes, the Food Savvy campaign, and promoting re-use initiatives, repair cafes and refill schemes. Fifteen master composting volunteers have been trained and over 100,000 items reused through Bury and Foxhall re-use shops. Our outreach work includes community talks, having a presence at major county shows, and school tours of the Suffolk energy-from-waste facility.
7. We are supporting a "battery box" project by enabling installations on the Suffolk County Council estate. The battery boxes support energy security, local networks, and carbon reduction by storing excess renewable energy. Each box saves an estimated 160 tonnes of carbon per year and will also generate income for the council.
8. We have developed and published a Local Nature Recovery Strategy for Suffolk to help improve wildlife habitats and reverse the decline of biodiversity across the region. A public consultation was completed in June 2025, and the strategy is available on our website.

9. We have worked to implement rights of way improvement schemes, including replacing major public rights of way structures at Halesworth, Bardwell and Ixworth, and a new public rights of way bridge at Lakenheath. We have also progressed the Sizewell C rights of way mitigation and green access improvement projects.
10. Two stretches of the King Charles III England Coast Path in Suffolk have formally opened. Establishment works are progressing on other approved stretches.
11. We are working to increase the biodiversity of our County Farms land. We have created a scheme at Ten Trees, Great Waldingfield, for volunteers to enhance a site for biodiversity, and are currently setting up a licence for a biodiversity group at Kirkley Ham, Lowestoft. Seventy two acres of land at Great Barton are going into a biodiversity scheme, and 23 tenant farmers have signed up for biodiversity advice from Suffolk Wildlife Trust and/or Suffolk Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group.
12. We continue to develop new opportunities for public engagement in Suffolk's archaeology. Following the completion of our successful Rendlesham Revealed community archaeology project, a new externally-funded Archaeological Outreach Officer post was created to deliver archaeological hands-on learning in Suffolk primary schools.

UNTIL THE END OF THE FINANCIAL YEAR 2025/26, WE WILL:

1. Support households and businesses to improve energy efficiency, reducing costs and emissions, by leading delivery of the government's Warm Homes: Local Grant to support low-income homes, and by managing the ongoing delivery of the Warm Homes Suffolk 0% Loan and Retrofit Assessment Voucher Schemes.
2. Develop a Suffolk-wide Retrofit Strategy to enable funding to be leveraged and priority areas to be targeted.
3. Support the delivery of electric vehicle (EV) charging infrastructure across Suffolk by beginning the roll out of over 6,000 on-street EV charging points, targeting locations with limited off-street parking; installing at least 60 new community EV charging hubs; and launching EV Car Clubs in six locations across Suffolk.
4. Start work on a new, purpose-built recycling centre for Ipswich; secure planning permission to enhance Stowmarket recycling centre; and work with Sizewell C to improve the access into Leiston recycling centre.
5. Work collaboratively to deliver the required infrastructure, contract changes, and resources to start the Simpler Recycling system and communicate the changes effectively to the people of Suffolk.
6. Promote waste minimisation by helping people understand reuse, repair, recycling and composting through engagement with the public at events and via behavioural change information across various platforms.
7. Publish flood investigation reports for all communities significantly impacted by Storm Babet, and distribute the available government grant funding to affected properties.
8. Develop and facilitate projects and initiatives to support the objectives of the Suffolk Local Nature Recovery Strategy.

9. Protect and maintain public rights of way and deliver green access network improvements using funding available from developers, Community Infrastructure Levy funding, and the Sizewell C Public Rights of Way Fund.
10. Establish and open the remaining stretches of the King Charles III England Coast Path, subject to Secretary of State decisions.
11. Deliver biodiversity enhancement on at least 30% of our estate by supporting Suffolk Highways, and our contractor Milestone, to implement biodiversity improvement plans and expanding the number of roadside nature reserves.
12. Lead the Suffolk Carbon Charter to continue support for, and further grow, a network of small businesses seeking to reduce their emissions.
13. Develop a training package for health professionals to help them discuss air quality and its impact on health with patients, aiming to minimise the impacts of outdoor and indoor air pollution on the health of Suffolk's residents.
14. Promote understanding of Suffolk's archaeology and help people engage in it by progressing the Romans Unearthed National Lottery Heritage Fund project to development stage, if our application is successful.

CASE STUDIES

Helping to make Suffolk homes warmer, safer and cheaper to run

Suffolk's private housing retrofit initiatives are supporting homeowners to improve energy efficiency through free retrofit assessments and interest-free finance. The schemes are designed to reduce carbon emissions, lower energy bills, and build resilient communities.

The Suffolk Energy Efficiency Assessment Scheme, funded by £240,000 from Suffolk Public Sector Organisations, has seen high demand since launching in November 2024. In the first four months, it generated 746 public enquiries, 152 assessments were completed, and a further 78 were scheduled. Managed by Reed in Partnership and delivered by Retrofit Coordination, this service provides residents with expert, personalised advice on improving their home's energy performance.

Complementing this is the Suffolk Warm Homes Loan Scheme, backed by a £3 million interest-free lending pot and delivered by social enterprise lender Lendology CIC. The council is offering interest free loans to eligible homeowners to help spread the cost of energy efficiency and renewable measures, such as insulation, solar panels, batteries, glazing or heat pumps, making decarbonisation financially accessible. Homeowners can secure loans from £2,000 to £15,000 to be repaid over a maximum of seven years at 0% interest. In the first six months, the loan scheme released 80 loans (totalling £690,000), approved £400,000 more, and is processing a further £1 million in applications - demonstrating strong uptake and public trust.

The two schemes were shortlisted for the Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE) Service Awards 2025 in the category Best Climate Action or Decarbonisation Initiative.

Plug In Suffolk project continues to grow

Electric cars with a range of over 200 miles are now available to book via the Plug In Suffolk Car Club. All Suffolk residents are eligible for free membership to the Car Club, with cars available at nine sites across the county, as part of an initial 18-month trial. The Car Club gives residents the opportunity to book an electric car for the minutes, hours or day they need, cutting out the expense of car ownership. Car Clubs have been trialled in other areas of the country and can improve air quality, reduce congestion and parking pressure, and increase mobility for those without access to their own car. Residents can also experience driving an electric vehicle without the cost of owning one.

For those who already own an electric vehicle, the options for charging will be boosted with over six thousand charging sockets to be installed on residential streets. Many of the locations were suggested by local residents in a survey carried out last year. Our ambition is to provide a public charge point within a 5-10 minute walk or wheel of every resident.

The county council has made these projects possible through our successful £7.3 million bid to the government's Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (LEVI) fund.

Working together for cleaner air

In 2021, Suffolk County Council brought together borough and district councils and health partners to, for the first time, work jointly on improving air quality and tackling its health impacts, on a county-wide scale.

An air quality profile report was published, which identified areas of concern and made recommendations on actions to reduce the impacts of poor air quality in Suffolk. As a result, the Suffolk Health and Wellbeing Board made air quality a priority and a Suffolk-wide Air Quality Strategy was developed, launching in 2023.

This unified approach to tackling poor air quality has led to the delivery of county-wide campaigns such as Suffolk Idling Action, and the launch of the Suffolk Air Quality Network made up of community groups and stakeholders. It has also resulted in a programme of community engagement and awareness raising, and the development of resources such as a schools' toolkit.

OUR AMBITIONS: PROVIDING VALUE FOR MONEY FOR OUR RESIDENTS

To meet the ambitions set out in this document and provide the best outcomes for Suffolk residents, it is crucial that the county council delivers the best possible value for money. This includes how we manage all our resources, such as staff, buildings, estates, and budgets. The cumulative pressures of demand and budget constraints means achieving these ambitions is tough. However, our commitment to make the best possible use of every pound of public money made available to us remains absolute.

SINCE OUR LAST ANNUAL PLAN, WORK HAS PROGRESSED TO ACHIEVE OUR AMBITION:

1. We have developed new and enhanced offers for people with care and support needs. These range from technology-enabled rooms in care homes and reablement and assessment beds in our hospitals, through to micro-enterprises supporting people in their local areas. Micro-enterprises also support our ambition to provide more choice and control by increasing the use of direct payments in Suffolk, and we have worked with Suffolk residents to co-design an improved direct payments process to make it easier to use.
2. In June 2025, Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service began utilising its new, cutting-edge control room in Ipswich. This introduces faster, smarter and more resilient 999 operations that will support Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service in responding to emergencies more effectively.
3. Our IT Service successfully supported the return of Suffolk's library service back into the council, ensuring all required systems and infrastructure were operational from day one, with no interruptions to service during the changeover.
4. We have implemented a new, modern IT system for the Suffolk Registration Service.
5. We have developed and launched a new artificial intelligence-powered digital assistant to support the council's workforce with access to key human resources policy information.
6. We have introduced Microsoft's Copilot generative artificial intelligence (AI) toolset to support increased productivity and creativity across the council.
7. We have implemented a new extended detection and response (XDR) platform to help strengthen the council's readiness to prevent, detect, and respond to cyber threats.
8. We have delivered a new, modern management information system for Suffolk schools to enhance their effectiveness in collecting, organising and processing data, and to support reporting requirements.
9. We have introduced a new process - the Intend to Spend process - for all spend over £25,000. This ensures early visibility and governance of proposed spend.
10. We have made property disposals of £1.7 million in 2024/25, with recent sales including the sale of former school land in Bury St Edmunds to support the development of new local SEND provision. The sale at auction of a community asset (Mildenhall Dome) has reduced the council's spend on non-operational property, and is enabling the asset to be brought back into use for the local community.

11. Suffolk County Council will receive an estimated £7 million of income for 2024/2025 from selling power created at its energy-from-waste site to the National Grid.
12. We had an overwhelmingly positive response from Suffolk residents to the recycling centres customer survey, with 96% of respondents satisfied or very satisfied with the service.

UNTIL THE END OF THE FINANCIAL YEAR 2025/26, WE WILL:

1. Continue to develop new adult social care service offers, through a strategic commissioning approach that embeds early intervention and prevention and increases choice and control. This includes improving provision for people with complex care needs, scaling up the micro-enterprise offer, and continuing to increase the use of digital care.
2. Pilot and implement artificial intelligence (AI) voice-to-text tools with frontline adult social care staff. This will save time on paperwork and enable social care staff to spend more time engaging with the adults and carers they support.
3. Commence work on the Cyber Assessment Framework (CAF), which was developed by the UK's National Cyber Security Centre. The framework has been adapted for local government by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) to improve cyber resilience across the sector.
4. Expand the Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) offering, which enables staff to use their personal devices, such as smartphones, tablets, or laptops, for work-related tasks. This approach allows staff to utilise devices they are comfortable with, potentially boosting productivity and providing greater flexibility around how they work.
5. Continue to leverage and scale the use of artificial intelligence (AI) and automation toolsets to improve efficiency and productivity across council services. We will broaden the rollout of tools such as Microsoft Copilot and pilot other AI products that have the potential to enhance service delivery and staff efficiency.
6. Implement a new, modern IT system for the Blue Badge service, enabling more efficient working for staff and an improved online experience for applicants.
7. Deliver a new broadband filtering service for Suffolk schools, enhancing protection and cyber security.
8. Implement a Gateway Process to provide additional assurance at key checkpoints in the processes of procuring and commissioning goods and services for the council. This will enhance governance, ensuring that key decisions have been reviewed and agreed at appropriate stages. Savings opportunities, cost avoidance, and additional benefits will also be identified and tracked via the Gateway process.
9. Continue to reduce energy consumption and spend in our core buildings. The council is now saving £670,000 per annum compared to our baseline costs in April 2022.

CASE STUDIES

Suffolk's once-in-a-generation, state-of-the-art fire control room goes live

In June 2025, Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service began utilising its cutting-edge control room in Ipswich, introducing faster, smarter and more resilient 999 operations.

Delivered in just 18 months, the initiative involved building a brand-new contact centre from the ground up, recruiting and training an entirely new team, and implementing bespoke configurations tailored to all the communities in Suffolk.

The control room includes several new features that will support Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service in responding to emergencies more effectively:

- **Better preparation for major incidents:** The system helps the team respond more quickly and manage operations more smoothly during large-scale emergencies, like floods and wildfires, which are becoming increasingly common in the UK.
- **Remote access:** Staff can now securely log in to the control system from any location, making it easier to set up mobile command centres or offer support remotely when needed.
- **Improved call and data handling:** A new system stores and organises control room voice recordings more securely, keeping all key information in one place and linking it to the right incidents.
- **Stronger regional teamwork:** The control room is part of a wider hub with Hertfordshire and Norfolk fire services, allowing the teams to support each other and share the load during busy periods, such as when multiple 999 calls are received simultaneously.

Adopting AI and Copilot: Enhancing services for staff and residents

Suffolk County Council (SCC) has taken a measured and responsible approach to adopting artificial intelligence (AI) technologies, including Microsoft Copilot, ensuring alignment with ethical standards and public trust. SCC's focus on transparency, data security, and inclusive design ensures that AI tools serve all communities equitably.

By embedding AI into daily workflows, staff benefit from streamlined processes, a reduced administrative burden, and faster access to insights - freeing up time for strategic and frontline work. Training and support for staff has been central to adoption, fostering confidence and innovation.

SCC has now deployed over 340 Microsoft Copilot licences. The use of Copilot's transcription, summarising, and analysis functions, as well as a host of other features, is delivering measurable benefits. A staff survey on Copilot's effectiveness showed an 81% satisfaction rate, with respondents reporting a median of 120 minutes saved per week – a clear productivity gain. The survey identified that further investment in training, integration and best practices can unlock even greater value.

Microsoft Copilot is supporting decision-making, automating routine tasks, and enhancing collaboration across departments. For residents, this translates into more responsive services, improved communication, and faster resolution of queries.

Overall, SCC's responsible deployment of AI is driving efficiency, improving public service delivery, and laying the foundation for a smarter, more connected council. As we provide more training and support, we expect the benefits to grow further as adoption, capability and competence increases, thereby further benefiting our staff and residents.

A modern registration management system

Suffolk County Council (SCC) partnered with WPC Software Ltd to co-develop a new, modern registration management system. The aim was to develop a system that would allow the public to register births and deaths and book appointments; arrange ceremony appointments for marriages, civil partnerships and citizenships; and request copies of certificates for births, marriages and deaths.

The new system would replace the legacy platform. The previous supplier had faced growing criticism regarding poor customer service and the lack of care taken in building and improving their system, with frequent errors disrupting service delivery.

WPC, an existing trusted supplier for Coroners' Services, worked with SCC and other local authorities to develop a reliable alternative. SCC invested £30,000 in the project via our IT Innovation Fund. This enabled the development of bespoke features, including financial reporting and Pay360 payment integration.

The project included the import of two years of historical data, requiring extensive cleansing due to formatting issues and incomplete extracts. Despite these challenges, the system went live in June 2025, supported by high-quality training and responsive supplier support.

The new system is significantly more reliable and error-free, improving staff confidence and reducing downtime. SCC will recoup its initial investment over the first three years of the contract. Return on investment will be achieved through reduced licensing costs, shared development with other councils, operational savings from streamlined workflows, improved reliability, and reduced staff time spent resolving system errors. The system is now positioned for wider adoption, and, due to our initial investment, SCC will have input into shaping its future development.

This project exemplifies how strategic supplier partnerships and co-development can deliver better outcomes for residents, improve service resilience, and provide long-term value for money.