

March 2025 report for the Thredling Division from Cllr Matthew Hicks

County leaders to propose one council for Suffolk

One council for Suffolk would make delivering public services simpler, cheaper and quicker, and better meet the needs of residents and businesses, county leaders have said. Following a recent government announcement that Suffolk's county, district and borough councils will be replaced with a single-tier system, Suffolk County Council argues that consolidating all services under one unitary authority is the only effective way to deliver against the government's criteria for local government reform. The move would see all council services, such as waste collection and disposal, housing, social care, planning, highways maintenance, leisure, school placements and travel and street cleaning, all provided by one authority - rather than the six that currently exist in Suffolk.

Bringing together district, borough and county council functions is expected to reduce duplication, lower administrative costs and ensure a more coordinated and cost-effective approach to delivering essential services. The council warns that splitting services among multiple bodies would force the duplication of essential functions - such as social care, highways maintenance and schools - currently managed at a county level. The key benefits of one council are:

Simpler for residents – one council would make it easier to understand and contact local government

Clearer accountability – there would be less confusion over who is responsible for what

Better use of funding – a more coherent, strategic, financially sustainable, county-wide approach to budgeting

Better alignment of services – since everything is under one roof, services can be more easily coordinated, creating opportunities to improve services for residents

More efficient decision-making – with just one council, decisions can be made more quickly

Stronger leadership – a single, visible and accountable body providing a clear strategic voice for Suffolk.

The council will submit its initial proposal to the government by 21 March, with a more detailed business case to follow later in the year. The government will then undertake a public consultation. The financial benefits of unitary local government are clear. By cutting unnecessary bureaucracy, the new council – whoever may serve on it – will have more money to invest in frontline public services, ensuring better value for taxpayers. But reorganisation must go beyond financial savings. It must also deliver greater accountability, speed up decision-making and lead to better outcomes for local communities. There is huge opportunity in pulling together services currently separated across the district, borough and county councils – such as housing and social care. If the government is serious about delivering savings, efficiencies, better outcomes for residents and financially sustainable local government, then there is only one answer - one council for Suffolk. Moreover, it is the only model that meets their criteria of serving over 500,000 people. One council for Suffolk will provide clear leadership, simplify access to services and eliminate the confusion of navigating multiple councils. Carving the county in two or three – as has been suggested - would defeat the purpose. The government's plans will also see the election of a mayor for Suffolk and Norfolk in May 2026, who would take control over strategic policy areas like transport infrastructure, economic development, health improvement and blue light services – along with devolved government funding to deliver positive change.

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

Thirty-three arts organisations and museums from across Suffolk have been awarded funding from Suffolk County Council's £500,000 Culture Project Fund. From baby classes to a new community radio show, the successful projects range in size and scope, and support an array of different people across Suffolk. Examples include promoting performing arts in Sudbury with the Quay Theatre, environmental events at Dunwich Museum, and an education and arts project to address racial

inequalities in Ipswich. The successful bids range from £1,000 to £27,000. The new fund, which was launched last year to boost cultural activity across the county, attracted 131 applications, requesting a total of £2 million in funding. The quality of applications was exceptionally high, and more than 60 projects scored 'excellent' or 'outstanding' against the assessment criteria. Following a rigorous selection process, a panel of experts from across the arts, heritage, and community sectors reviewed 62 shortlisted applications. This resulted in 33 successful bids. We are thrilled to be supporting such a diverse range of creative and cultural projects through the Culture Project Fund. As well as some higher-profile organisations, it's wonderful that lots of smaller projects, which often get overlooked for funding, will also benefit. I know firsthand the difference that grassroots initiatives make to the people that use them. The level of ambition and creativity shown in the applications was truly inspiring, demonstrating the incredible talent and passion that exists within Suffolk's cultural sector. This funding will help bring new artistic experiences to local communities, support the growth of our creative industries, and celebrate Suffolk's rich heritage. A number of small grants – up to £1,500 – are still available for arts organisations and museums across Suffolk. There will be another round of funding for large and medium projects, which will open in Autumn 2025. These new projects will be delivered in 2026/27.

Suffolk County Council confirms 2025/26 budget

Suffolk County Council has confirmed how it will spend its money in the forthcoming financial year – an £803.7 million plan focused on protecting essential services and supporting the county's most vulnerable residents. The council's budget for 2025/26 was approved at a meeting of all councillors on Thursday 13 February, with an emphasis on meeting rising demand for children's and adult care services. For every £1 the council spends in the next financial year, 77 pence will go directly toward services that support the health and wellbeing of people in Suffolk. The remaining 23 pence will fund other critical areas such as fire and rescue, highway maintenance, climate initiatives, waste management and bus services, as well as the infrastructure, staff, and technology required to keep services running efficiently. This is another budget set in challenging times. Economic growth remains sluggish, public finances are under pressure from rising demand and global uncertainty continues to create financial instability. But it is precisely in times like these that we must stay focused on our responsibility to the people of Suffolk. We are committed to delivering high-quality public services that make a real and lasting difference in people's lives. We will continue to prioritise those who need our support the most, including vulnerable children and adults who require assistance to live independently. The council's budget will increase by 6.7%, from £752.9 million in 2024/25 to £803.7 million in 2025/26. Despite a slight uplift in Government funding for local authorities, rising costs and growing demand have required the council to set significant savings targets to balance the books. The council has approved £10.9 million in new savings, which will focus on restructuring and transforming how services are delivered. This follows £17.5 million in savings approved in the previous year, bringing total savings for the 2025/26 financial year to £28.4 million. Suffolk County Council's share of Council Tax will rise by 4.99% next year, which includes a 2.99% general increase and a further 2% dedicated wholly to helping meet the rising costs of social care. We know that many of our residents are feeling the pressures of rising costs. That's why it's our duty to ensure that every pound of public money is spent wisely and delivers the best possible value for our residents.

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