

Cllr Elaine Bryce
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Parish Newsletter

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New highways services arrive in Suffolk as multi-million-pound partnership goes live

The new contract, which is worth in the region of £800 million - £1 billion, will deliver highway projects and improvements across Suffolk for up to 20 years, including maintaining roads, pavements and rights of way, improving drainage, hedge trimming, construction of new road schemes, snow-clearing and gritting and much more.

Milestone Infrastructure, part of M Group Services, was awarded Suffolk's new highways services contract back in February and since then has been working with Suffolk County Council to mobilise the new contract ahead of it commencing on 1 October.

When seeking a new highways partner, the county council wanted a keener focus on delivering greater social value, building on the council's commitment to carbon reduction and protecting the environment, using local skills and talent, and giving young people the opportunity to work in the sector.

With this in mind, the new partnership was built around six key contract objectives, which will form the basis for all that Suffolk Highways delivers going forward. These objectives are:

- Collaboration and Partnership
- Social Value
- Environment and Net Zero Carbon
- Customer Communication and Engagement
- Commercialism and Enterprise
- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

Councillor Paul West, Suffolk County Council's Cabinet Member for Ipswich, Operational Highways and Flooding, said:

"I am delighted to welcome our new highways partner, Milestone, to Suffolk. There has been a great deal of work taking place over the past few months to ensure we were ready to start the new partnership on 1 October whilst continuing to deliver services to our residents.

"As highways services tend to impact all those living, working or travelling in our county; it was essential we found the best possible fit for what was needed here in Suffolk.

"I want to take this opportunity to thank everyone involved in successfully procuring, awarding and mobilising this new contract, whilst continuing to keep our county safe and moving."

To read about the new Suffolk Streetlighting contract with McCann, visit: [Go Live! Suffolk County Council Street Lighting Services Contract Gets Underway - McCann \(mccann-ltd.co.uk\)](https://www.mccann-ltd.co.uk)

Awards recognise dedication of Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service and Trading Standards

A column by Councillor Andrew Reid, Suffolk County Council Cabinet Member for Public Health and Public Protection.

I recently had the great honour to attend and present awards at the annual Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service awards.

As the County Council's Cabinet Member for Public Health and Public Protection, I know how much of an important fixture this event is in the service calendar.

It is an opportunity to highlight the work happening to protect people on a daily basis, something I have witnessed first-hand.

I was joined at the awards ceremony by His Majesty's Vice Lord-Lieutenant of Suffolk, Robert Rous, High Sheriff of Suffolk Mark Pendlington, Councillor Keith Robinson, Chairman of Suffolk County Council, and Chief Fire Officer Jon Lacey.

Between us, we handed out more than 50 richly deserved awards, long service medals and clasps, and when you read the citations it really does bring home to you how lucky we are to have such dedicated people.

There was the team from Princes Street station that saved the life of a young woman, Watch Manager Sam Linton of Newmarket Fire Station and his colleagues, who between them have raised nearly £100,000 for the Firefighters Charity, and Watch Manager Mark Cowling who has raised more than £20,000 to provide community defibrillators to volunteer emergency services – just three examples, but there are many more.

However, the awards do not just recognise the Fire and Rescue Service. We have an exceptional Trading Standards team which has an outstanding reputation both within Suffolk and further afield.

The ceremony saw a Certificate of Merit given to Trading Standards officer Nousha Meek for her work in improving child stair gates standards.

Also receiving certificates were Senior Trading Standards Officer Claire Missen, Operational Support Officer Eun Young and Trading Standards Team 3 for their work in bringing a rogue builder to justice, while carers Paul Watts and Sally Mills of Caring Moments Ltd in Lowestoft received the same for their work in saving a 101-year-old woman from overseas 'clairvoyant' scammers.

Both Fire and Trading Standards are excellent examples of teams that demonstrate a 'can do' approach in all their endeavours, working around the clock to serve our communities.

I have been fortunate enough to visit fire stations across the county, meeting both operational and non-operational staff, and it was a pleasure to see the result of long-term

plans with the opening of two new combined police and fire stations at Princes Street and Stowmarket.

I also had the privilege to attend the opening of the dedicated Fire Service Headquarters at Endeavour House, and the fantastic new training centre at Wattisham which officially opened just a few weeks ago.

Similarly, I continue to be impressed by the wide range of work from staff in the team to help protect Suffolk, whether this be looking after animal welfare, sadly very relevant today, establishing cold calling zones, bringing rogue traders to justice, halting the sale of illicit tobacco or stopping scams which target the most vulnerable in society.

Back in July, I saw just how crucial this work is, when I shared a day out with Trading Standards. I had the opportunity to see how the team protect the welfare of livestock and prevent outbreaks of animal disease.

I also witnessed how valuable their work is by stopping the sale of hundreds of dangerous vapes from across our county at the start of the year.

Finally, a special mention should go to close colleagues of the fire service, the Salvation Army volunteers.

It was a pleasure to recently invite them to the fire service headquarters and celebrate 45 years of working together.

The volunteers assist our firefighters by providing refreshments at major incidents, something which is very much appreciated when firefighters are working hard in often difficult conditions.

The awards evening was meticulously planned but in a deviation from the programme the High Sheriff presented the service with a special Certificate of Gratitude and Recognition – it was, and will continue to be, richly deserved.

Statement following funding announcement for Ely and Haughley rail junctions

The Government has announced funding for upgrades to Ely and Haughley rail junctions today.

Councillor Richard Smith MVO, Suffolk County Council Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Transport Strategy and Waste, said:

“This is really excellent news for Suffolk. The infrastructure at these junctions currently lacks capacity for the demand from freight and passenger traffic. This investment will reduce those constraints and allow more trains to run through Ely and Haughley, including freight on rail out of Felixstowe and more passenger services between Ipswich and Peterborough.

“This will ease congestion on our roads, help us on our journey towards net zero by reducing carbon emissions and provide a significant boost to the local economy.”

‘Bike Library’ pilot launched at Lowestoft school

Suffolk County Council has launched a ‘Bike Library’ for year 5 and 6 pupils at Phoenix St. Peter Academy, Lowestoft as part of a pilot project to promote active travel.

The free loan bikes were secured using funding from Active Travel England’s Capability and Ambition Fund and support the county council’s ambition to look after residents’ health and wellbeing.

Following additional funding from ScottishPower Renewables, supporting partner of the Suffolk stage of the Tour of Britain, the pupils and their parents or carers will also be offered a Bikeability training course to give them the skills, confidence and understanding they need to take their bike on the road.

The course will also teach them the basics of bike maintenance, such as how to fix a puncture, and how to stay safe while cycling.

As part of the pilot, Rotary Club of Lowestoft East Point and Lowestoft Rising have contributed bike locks and helmets to go with the bikes.

Councillor Richard Smith MVO, Suffolk County Council Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Transport Strategy and Waste, said:

“I would like to thank ScottishPower Renewables for supporting this pilot project and providing the opportunity to expand what we can offer. This partnership is a positive legacy from the company’s backing of the Suffolk stage of the Tour of Britain, and I am pleased to see them supporting active travel in the wider community.”

Developers risk "treating Suffolk communities with contempt" as the latest round of large-scale energy projects in Suffolk emerge

Energy developers who are bringing forward large-scale energy projects without speaking to councils or communities, were criticised heavily today (October 11th) by Councillor Richard Rout, Deputy Leader of Suffolk County Council and Cabinet member for Finance and the Environment, following the latest publication of National Grid's Transmission Entry Capacity (TEC) Register.

The TEC Register is a list of projects, which often end up as large nationally significant infrastructure projects (called NSIPs), that have secured the right to connect to National Grid’s network if they are consented, under the Planning Act 2008 by government, not local councils. These connection offers, which form a legally binding contract with National Grid,

are routinely published and made, prior to the development and consenting of electricity generation or storage projects.

The current list of connection offers published by National Grid shows that new projects have been offered connections at National Grid's sites in Suffolk, at Bramford near Ipswich, and at Yaxley, near Eye, in north Suffolk. These new projects are large-scale solar panel and battery storage proposals in the same style as the recent SUNNICA scheme in West Suffolk, which is a proposal to create a 2500-acre Solar Farm on the Suffolk Cambridgeshire border.

Councillor Richard Rout, Deputy Leader of Suffolk County Council, and Cabinet Member for Finance and the Environment said:

"It is both shocking and disappointing to me that councils and communities in Suffolk are finding out about these very large proposals for the first time in this way. Suffolk County Council has not been approached by any of the businesses that have had a connection offer from National Grid, and neither have the communities, who will be expected to host these huge schemes. When you consider that a connection offer from National Grid forms a legally binding contract with developers, it is simply inexplicable to me that such a contract could exist without anyone locally being made aware, by the developer, of their proposals. In my view, this treats the opinions of local people, and their council representatives, with contempt and is a terrible way to begin projects of this nature. Any of these projects, if they do come forward and are submitted to the planning inspectorate for planning permission, have serious implications for local people, our county's infrastructure, our agricultural capacity and heritage, not to mention our precious natural environment and wildlife habitats."

Suffolk County Council, which is recognised by the Government as a centre of excellence when it comes to managing the impacts of big energy schemes, has previously outlined its concerns over the way large energy developers treat communities. In July this year, Cllr Rout wrote to the Secretary of State for Levelling up, Housing and Communities, Rt Hon Michael Gove MP, to outline the significant shortfalls of the West Suffolk SUNNICA application, described as "the worst example of what can go wrong" when developers mistreat local communities.

Cllr. Rout continued:

"Suffolk County Council readily understands and accepts the extent and magnitude of the infrastructure required to deliver national energy independence. However, food security is equally important, and we have grave concerns about taking vast swathes of high-quality agricultural land out of food production for solar farms. It is absolutely critical that projects, like those emerging for the first time today, are handled in the right way and treat local people with the respect they deserve. Any attempt to sneak projects through the back door or avoid early meaningful engagement with communities is simply not good enough, and I will continue to call it out when I see it happening."

These projects can now be brought forward by the respective developers for consideration under the NSIP programme and, if they meet the criteria, will be considered by the planning

inspectorate for approval in due course. Due to the size of these proposals being like the SUNNICA proposal, if they do come forward, their planning applications will be ultimately decided by central government, not local councils.

Trading Standards seize 2,500 illegal vapes in Ipswich

Devices that supplied hundreds more puffs than the legal limit are found in a shop storeroom.

Suffolk Trading Standards has seized more than 2,000 illegal vapes from a shop in Ipswich.

Approximately 2,500 vapes were found in a storeroom when officers visited the premises following a successful test purchase of illegal tobacco.

Used properly, vapes and e-cigarettes can be a successful way of helping people to stop smoking. But criminals are capitalising on this, leading to a rise in illegal vapes. In addition, some retailers are increasingly selling vapes to underage children, who are often enticed by the colourful packaging and sweet flavours.

The seized vapes are illegal because they supply over the number of puffs allowed under the Tobacco and Related Products Regulations 2016.

The regulations state that vapes should provide a maximum of 600 puffs, but these devices indicate between 3,500 puffs to up to more than 10,000.

Investigations into the retailer continue.

Graham Crisp, Head of Suffolk Trading Standards, said:

“Illegal vapes such as these breach the safety legislation and indicate that they could be unsafe to use.

“That legislation is in place to help protect the public, and businesses who break those regulations can expect tough penalties.

“We will continue to carry out checks on retailers across Suffolk, taking legal action where necessary.”

Councillor Andrew Reid, Suffolk County Council Cabinet Member for Public Health and Public Protection, said:

“Vaping has an important role to play in helping smokers to quit, especially when used in conjunction with specialist support from a stop smoking service.

“However illegal devices such as these are nothing to do with helping people quit smoking, instead they exacerbate the problem of inappropriate vaping.

“This seizure is another example of the on-going excellent work being carried out by Suffolk Trading Standards in tackling this problem.”

Consumers can ensure the vape that they are purchasing is legal by checking the following:

- That the tank of a vape is a maximum size of 2ml, and the largest refill bottle is 10ml in size or less
- That all liquids come in childproof bottles displaying nicotine warnings and have an accompanying safety leaflet
- That vapes have a nicotine strength of no more than 20mg/ml, or 2%
- That a maximum number of around 600 puffs is offered

Anyone who suspects that a business is inappropriately selling vaping materials can report this in confidence to Suffolk Trading Standards via the Citizens Advice Consumer helpline on **0808 223 1133**.

More LINK foster carers are urgently needed in Suffolk

A column by Councillor Stephen Burroughes, Deputy Cabinet Member for Children & Young Peoples Services with responsibility for Fostering and Adoption.

Suffolk County Council urgently needs to recruit more LINK foster carers for children with additional needs and disabilities. LINK foster carers serve as a lifeline for parents and carers of children with disabilities, providing essential breaks in their caregiving responsibilities.

Unlike some other types of foster care, LINK care is a voluntary arrangement, often suggested to families as a means of supporting the family unit. It is designed to be a long-term commitment, with the goal of the LINK carer becoming an extension of the family. They resemble a reliable family friend, trusted and equipped with the skills to offer practical short break care to these children. Some of the most successful LINK arrangements in Suffolk have lasted well into the child's teenage years.

LINK care offers flexibility, ranging from a few hours per month on a weekend to several nights per month. It provides children with disabilities the chance to explore new environments and form close relationships with trusted adults and their families. It also gives parents a much-needed break from their caregiving responsibilities, allowing them to get a good night's sleep, have a night away, or spend quality time with their other children.

Shelagh is one of our LINK foster carers who embodies the heartwarming essence of the LINK programme. In her own words, Shelagh reflects on her experience;

"I went to a fostering information event and LINK was mentioned so I asked what it was. I thought that it was a good way to start if I wanted to foster and I have never looked back since.

"It was a year before I was matched with *Alfie. We met at Christmas time when he was 2 and a half and I've been looking after him for 12 years now. It's been amazing!

"It's not like LINK now, it's like he's my little nephew. He's part of the family. I was there when he first started walking, I've been to his school and watched him in his Christmas play."

For Alfie's mum, having Shelagh has been an incredibly valuable experience. "LINK has enabled Alfie to spend time with another trusted adult other than just me and his dad. We don't really have any local family, so it is good for Alfie to spend time with others and feel secure."

The advantages of LINK care are not limited to Alfie alone. It also provides respite for Alfie's parents, as his mum explains, "He is a really good child but his needs are demanding so the respite we get from LINK is essential – although we can't help missing him when he's gone!"

"Shelagh has long been considered part of our family. We trust and know that if there were any problems, Shelagh would pick up the phone to let us know and vice versa."

LINK carers are particularly in demand for Suffolk's younger cohort of disabled children, typically between the ages of 3-8 years old. There is also a gap in the availability of those who use or are willing to learn British Sign Language to provide short break care for deaf children in Suffolk.

If you believe that you could become a LINK carer and make a positive difference in the lives of children, please do not hesitate to get in touch. The needs of children requiring LINK care can be diverse and varied, which is why LINK carers must possess qualities of kindness and empathy. They should be willing to learn about disabilities and open to training that equips them with the skills and knowledge needed to provide compassionate care to these children.

To find out more about this rewarding journey and how you can become a Link carer, we encourage you to visit our website www.fosterandadopt.suffolk.gov.uk/link-care, get in contact with us at fosterandadopt@suffolk.gov.uk or call 01473 264800. Your commitment can truly make a lasting impact on the lives of children in need.

Council urges communities to respond to Sea Link consultation

Suffolk County Council is preparing its response to proposals for a significant off-shore electricity connection which could affect Saxmundham and Aldeburgh. It is encouraging local residents and businesses to do the same.

Sea Link is a proposal for a new 2 gigawatt subsea high voltage direct current electricity connection developed by National Grid Electricity Transmission. It is approximately 140km in length and predominately offshore.

A [statutory consultation](#) opened to the public on 24 October, and closes on 18 December 2023.

The council remains concerned about the lack of coordination with this, and other offshore energy projects such as Nautilus and Lionlink. It also fears for the impact on local coastal communities and the environment.

Plans for Sea Link include:

- a connection from the existing transmission network via the consented, but as yet unbuilt, Friston Substation
- landfall on the Suffolk coast between Aldeburgh and Thorpeness
- a 2 GW high voltage direct current (HVDC) converter station up to 26 metres high plus external equipment (such as lightning protection & railings for walkways) near Saxmundham
- a high voltage alternating current (HVAC) underground cable of approximately 1.7 km in length between the proposed Friston Substation and the proposed converter station
- 10 km of HVDC underground cable between Saxmundham, and a transition joint bay (TJB) approximately 900 m inshore from a landfall point between Aldeburgh and Thorpeness

Councillor Richard Rout, Suffolk County Council’s Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Environment, said:

“We have been raising our concerns at the highest level, stressing that all these energy projects off Suffolk’s coast need to be aligned to reduce their impact on the county. The coordination of cabling, landing points and construction is essential – anything short of this, we find unacceptable.

“The impact of the Sea Link proposals on local communities should not be underestimated, which would see miles of underground cabling, landfall on our coastline and a large converter station built near Saxmundham, which would be taller than the iconic House in the Clouds in nearby Thorpeness.

“We support the government’s drive for energy security, but will not stand for the bare minimum mitigations that developers can apply to projects of this scale, which show little consideration for local communities.

“I would urge local residents and businesses to join us in sharing their worries and concerns about the coordination of these projects, and the potential impacts of Sea Link on the local landscape and natural environment.”

In December 2022, the council submitted [a 58-page response](#) to NGET’s non-statutory consultation, outlining its concerns to the initial Sea Link proposals. It will continue to engage with National Grid to achieve best possible outcomes for the communities and the environment.

For more information, see below:

Sea Link information on National Grid website:

<https://www.nationalgrid.com/electricity-transmission/network-and-infrastructure/infrastructure-projects/sealink>

Suffolk County Council's responses to Sea Link:

<https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/planning-waste-and-environment/major-infrastructure-projects/nationally-significant-infrastructure-projects-nsips/national-grid-electricity-generation-sea-link>

New fund delivers digital boost for Suffolk

Almost £250,000 of funding was announced at an event today (October 25th), giving a boost to the county's ambitions to reduce the number of people excluded from the benefits of digital technology.

Suffolk County Council has contributed £100,000, with £143,000 coming from District and Borough Council funding, earmarked for digital inclusion projects.

Suffolk's Digital Inclusion Fund will be open to bidders from early November for initiatives that will support people of all ages, but particularly those who are at risk of being disadvantaged by being excluded from accessing digital support and information.

The fund has been created as a collaboration between Suffolk County Council, district and borough councils, voluntary and private sector partners and Suffolk Community Foundation. It is a direct result of Suffolk County Council's Policy Development Panel, held in 2022, which recommended a series of actions to reduce digital poverty and its effects in Suffolk.

The event called on key partners to support the new fund, making a further commitment to playing their part in the ambition for a digitally enabled Suffolk. Prospective bidders are encouraged to apply through Suffolk Community Foundation's website www.suffolkcf.org.uk

Evidence suggests that by not having the skills or the means to use online services – everything from online shopping, looking up important information and advice and using transactional services such as applying for bus passes – people are at risk of poorer health, reduced income and even a lower life expectancy.

In 2021, Healthwatch Suffolk, who participated in the event, co-produced principles for digital health and care. These principles provide important guidance for organisations intending to deliver health or social care services using digital to ensure people have a meaningful choice over how and when they access information and it is available to them in the format they need.

Councillor Bobby Bennett, Cabinet Member for Equality and Communities, said:

“I’m delighted to launch the new Digital Inclusion Fund for Suffolk. Through this fund we can support projects which will make a real difference in increasing digital inclusion in our county. From online shopping to applying for a bus pass, we are moving more and more towards digital solutions in our everyday lives. We want to make sure people are not left behind, whether that’s through improving access to more affordable broadband, building vital life skills or providing additional support. This is an exciting opportunity to support more people in Suffolk to benefit from digital technology and work to address poor health outcomes linked to digital exclusion.”

Councillor Philip Faircloth-Mutton, Deputy Cabinet Member for Transformation, who led the 2022 Policy Development Panel, said:

“Today’s fund launch is a fantastic example of putting recommendations into action. The Policy Development Panel wanted to supply the impetus for local projects to make increased digital inclusion a reality, by offering funding to organisations and groups who know their communities best. This is a practical commitment of Suffolk County Council empowering local people in local communities right across the county. It is just the start of what I hope will be a transformative process that will make a difference to Suffolk people’s lives.”

Speakers at the event included Cllr Bobby Bennett, Cllr Faircloth-Mutton, Stuart Keeble, Director of Public Health, Nick Khan, Strategic Director at East Suffolk Council and Andy Yacoub, Chief Executive of Healthwatch Suffolk, Melanie Craig, Chief Executive Officer of Suffolk Community Foundation and Tim Holder, Director of Development and Communications at Suffolk Community Foundation.

Healthwatch Suffolk’s *Digital Care and Health: Guiding principles for health and social care providers and commissioners planning or delivering digital care in Suffolk and north east Essex* is available at www.healthwatchsuffolk.co.uk

Council seeks your views for next year’s budget

Suffolk County Council is keen to hear from Suffolk residents, businesses and local communities, as it decides how it will spend money next year.

[An online consultation](#) has been launched, and a number of focus groups will be held, to explain the council’s current financial situation, along with the chance for Suffolk residents and businesses to have a say on Council Tax proposals.

The council’s budget setting process will take into account the responses to the consultation, advice from council officers, elected members from political groups, businesses and partners in health and other public service organisations across Suffolk.

Results of the consultation will be included in the report considered by the council when agreeing the budget in February 2024.

Councillor Richard Rout, Suffolk County Council's Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Environment, said:

“When we ran this survey last year, we had a fantastic response from around 2,700 Suffolk residents and businesses. I would welcome even more people completing this year's short survey, to contribute to our decision-making.

“Last year it gave us excellent insight into the public's priorities, with social care services for adults and children being high on that list. This aligned with the council's thinking and we invested an additional £50m in these areas for this current year.”

The council's budget consultation helps to explain the council's finances, what it has been doing to save money, and how it can generate more money to spend on public services.

The two main ways in which the council can increase the budget, are an increase in the money it receives from government, and/or through Council Tax.

There are three key questions, the first is on which services people have recently used, the second asks for thoughts on seeking a greater contribution to Council Tax to help fund public services, and the third on which service area you would like to see more money spent.

Councillor Rout continues:

“For years this administration has managed our finances well, and we have built up appropriate reserves to be able to see us through difficult times. We're facing those times now, but can only spend our reserves once, meaning our budget for next year will bring new challenges.

“We continue to lobby government, to demonstrate the challenges we are facing, despite our success making savings each year. Many other councils are doing the same, Suffolk is not alone in this.

“To hear from Suffolk residents about the services they use, and their thoughts on Council Tax for next year, will be very helpful as we plan ahead.”

The online consultation opens on 25 October and closes on 4 December 2023, and can be found at www.suffolk.gov.uk/budget. Focus groups are also being organised with local community groups and members of the public, details of which will be shared on the council's website and social media channels.

More than 200 properties flooded by Storm Babet

True number could be much higher as councils urge people to report all flooded premises and government funding available to those who report flooding.

Interim figures show more than 200 properties in Suffolk were flooded by Storm Babet.

The number of flooded premises, including businesses and homes, is expected to be higher as Suffolk councils and emergency planners work together to compile a full list.

Councillor Matthew Hicks, Leader of Suffolk County Council, said:

“It is absolutely key that all residents who suffered flood damage report the incident. I understand that the pressures of finding somewhere to live or work, or stripping out damaged belongings may have dominated people’s lives since Friday, but I would urge them to take the time to fill in a flood report online. We know that this financial support is urgently needed, and we will do everything in our power to get it out to home and business owners as soon as possible.”

On Wednesday, Communities Secretary Michael Gove and Environment Secretary Thérèse Coffey announced a number of financial measures to support those who have experienced exceptional localised flooding.

Under the measures announced:

- Flooded households in affected areas can apply for up to £500 to give cash quickly to help with immediate costs.
- Households and businesses significantly affected by recent flooding will be eligible for 100% council tax and business rates relief for at least three months.
- Small-to-medium-sized businesses in affected areas will be eligible for up to £2,500 from the Business Recovery Grant to help them return quickly to business as usual.
- Eligible flood-hit property owners will be able to apply for up to £5,000 to help make their homes and businesses more resilient to future flooding via the Property Flood Resilience Repair Grant Scheme.

The support will be made available through a scheme known as the Flood Recovery Framework, which is used in exceptional circumstances to support councils and communities following severe flooding.

The full details of the scheme are yet to be announced by the Government, including where residents can apply and who is eligible. Suffolk County Council will share updates once received.

To report a flood visit the [report a flood in Suffolk](#) page. Alternatively, you can call the customer service number on 0345 606 6171.

Suffolk Residents invited to help shape the future of library services

A public consultation has been launched today (Monday 30 October), encouraging Suffolk Residents to tell Suffolk County Council what they want from their library services in the future.

Suffolk County Council's contract with Suffolk's Libraries Industrial and Provident Society (IPS) Limited, the independent charity that runs the library service, comes to an end on 31 May 2025, with a new contract set to begin in June 2025. The Council is therefore seeking views from the public about what is important to them, ahead of awarding the new contract.

The 13-week consultation will be followed by a competitive Tender Process, before the new contract is awarded in November 2024.

To inform the consultation, the council has undertaken engagement with over 30 organisations including Suffolk's Libraries IPS Limited staff, key service users, schools and partner organisations.

A key focus of the consultation is the council's Library outreach services, which include three mobile library vehicles, serving more than 500 stops across rural parts of the county each month, for the pickup and exchange of books.

The mobile library vehicles are coming to the end of their life and the council therefore needs to consider the best way to continue to deliver these services to people in rural areas of the county going forward.

Library Outreach services also include Pop-up Libraries and a home library service, run by local volunteers, for Suffolk residents that find it difficult to access a library building or mobile library.

The consultation is made up of two parts. Part one gives residents an opportunity to tell the council what they value in their library service and what they would like to see more of in the future. Part two seeks views on how Library Outreach services could be run in the future.

The council is keen to hear from people who currently use library services and those who do not, to better understand the needs across the county. This feedback will help to inform the requirements for the future contract.

Cllr Bobby Bennett, Cabinet Member for Equality and Communities, said:

"We understand the vital role that libraries play in our communities. As we look ahead to awarding a new library contract in 2025, it is important to take the time to understand what our residents value the most and to gather feedback on options for library outreach services. Suffolk has a nationally recognised service which is seen as leading the way for other library services. Building on the good work already happening in Suffolk, we are committed to

supporting library services to retain this high level of service for our residents providing community spaces for people to learn, socialise and take part in activities as well as borrowing books! I would encourage Suffolk residents, whether you currently use library services or not, to complete the consultation to help us shape the future of Library Services in Suffolk.”

The value of the new contract will be £6.8m per year, increased from the previous contract value of £5.9m. The increase takes into account increased service costs, management of the Library Outreach service, and to allow for innovation in future years.

The term of the contract will be 6 years, with the option to extend for a further 6 years.

The consultation is open from today, Monday 30 October, until Friday 26 January.

Residents can have their say by visiting www.suffolk.gov.uk/LibraryConsultation

Alternative formats of the consultation are available on request, please email: Libraries.consultation@suffolk.gov.uk

Those who cannot access the consultation online can request a printed copy or assistance with completing the survey by calling 0345 603 1842.

The results of the consultation will be considered by Suffolk County Council at its meeting of the Cabinet in March 2024.