

District Councillors' Annual Report 2024 / 25

Devolution and Local Government Reform

In February 2025, Suffolk was confirmed as one of the areas selected for the government's Devolution Priority Programme. As a result, the 2025 County Council elections have been postponed until May 2026, aligning with the election for a new 'Mayor of Norfolk and Suffolk.'

According to the government's proposed timeline, the District and Borough Council elections planned for May 2027 will be replaced by elections for a 'shadow unitary authority.' The County Council and District/Borough Councils are set to be dissolved in April 2028, replaced by the new Unitary Authority. The shadow unitary councillors elected in May 2027 will then transition to full Unitary Councillors.

The County Council has expressed its support for a single, Suffolk-wide authority. Meanwhile, the District and Borough Councils have suggested alternative models: one with two authorities (East and West), or one with three authorities (East, West, and 'Greater Ipswich'). Under the two-authority model, West Suffolk, Mid Suffolk, and Babergh would form 'West Suffolk,' while East Suffolk and Ipswich would form 'East Suffolk.'

In the three-authority model, 'Greater Ipswich' would encompass the areas surrounding Ipswich, including parts of Babergh (e.g., Sproughton and Pinewood), Mid Suffolk (Claydon, Barham, etc.), and East Suffolk (Rushmere, Kesgrave, and Felixstowe). The fate of the remaining areas is still under discussion, but combining West Suffolk and Babergh, as well as Mid Suffolk and East Suffolk, into the two remaining authorities is actively being considered.

The initial plans were submitted on 21st March 2025, and the government will provide feedback (though the format of this feedback is unclear) before final plans are due by 26th September 2025. The government will then make its final decision. The government has indicated that new unitary authorities should have a population between 500,000 and one million.

With a population of around 760,000, a single, Suffolk-wide authority would be the only option to fulfil the government's criteria, although they have said that exceptions may be made in special cases. Furthermore, the government expects the existing Districts and Boroughs to serve as the foundational units for any new authority, which could undermine the feasibility of a three-authority model that would require significant division of existing Districts.

Budget 2025/26

On 27th February 2025, Mid Suffolk District Council approved its budget for the 2025/26 fiscal year. This budget freezes Council Tax and all current fees and charges for the year, while continuing a significant capital investment programme aimed at Stowmarket. This includes the development of a new health, education, and leisure facility, as well as a new Skills & Innovation Centre at Gateway 14.

The Administration rejected an Opposition amendment to the budget that would have allocated £1.5 million to a fund for villages and rural communities. However, they did agree to repurpose an existing fund ('regeneration in towns outside of Stowmarket') into a broader 'Rural Support Fund,' which will total £2.1 million over five years (2025/26 to 2029/30)—with £300k allocated for the first two years and £500k for the remaining three.

Local Plan Update

During the Full Council meeting on 27th February 2025, it was announced that Part 2 of Mid Suffolk's Local Plan (which contained site allocations) would be scrapped and replaced with a 'Local Plan Review.' This change comes in response to the government's decision to revise the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and increase housing targets for local authorities.

The new Local Plan Review will expand upon the existing Part 1 (which outlines planning policies), incorporating new site allocations based on the updated housing targets. The plan will cover a 20-year period from 2024 to 2044, with evidence gathered for Part 2, including site submissions, being incorporated into the review.

The development of the new plan will follow this timeline:

- Scoping and participation stage (minimum four months) – March 2026 to July 2026
- Plan visioning, strategy development, and first public consultation – August 2026 to March 2027
- Evidence gathering and draft plan – April 2027 to December 2027
- Second public consultation and submission – January 2028 to June 2028
- Examination and modifications – July 2028 to March 2029
- Adoption – April 2029

This process brings significant uncertainty, especially since the adoption of the plan will occur after Mid Suffolk District Council is slated for dissolution.

Changes to Refuse Collection

On 26th September 2024, Mid Suffolk District Council approved changes to waste collection, set to begin on 31st March 2026. These changes include:

- A shift to three-weekly refuse collections instead of the current fortnightly schedule.
- A weekly food waste collection.
- Separate recycling for glass, cartons, and plastic films, as mandated by the Environment Act 2021.

Though the Act was intended to prevent local authorities from reducing refuse collections to three weeks or longer, Mid Suffolk District Council has opted to implement this change. The new waste collection pattern is outlined in the graphic in the appendix.

Community Rail Partnership

Mid Suffolk District Council has supported the creation of Greater Anglia's new Community Rail Partnership for the Ipswich to Cambridge line. The partnership aims to improve and promote rail services along this vital regional corridor, aligning the development of services with local needs.

The partnership will focus on communities served by the line, including Ipswich, Needham Market, Stowmarket, Elmswell, Thurston, Bury St Edmunds, Kennett, Newmarket, Dullingham, and Cambridge. Funding will come from Greater Anglia, Suffolk County Council, the Cambridge and Peterborough Combined Authority, West Suffolk Council, Cambridgeshire County Council, Ipswich Borough Council, and Cambridge City Council.

Investment in Stowmarket Town Centre

Mid Suffolk has committed £1.5 million from the Gateway 14 development to regenerate Stowmarket town centre, focusing on bringing empty units back into use. The Stowmarket Town Centre Gateway Fund is now open for applications from property agents, landlords of vacant units, and potential tenants, to identify the best uses for the funding in fostering new businesses and community ventures.

Additional proposals include:

- A £400,000 grant scheme for existing retailers to enhance their shopfronts, focusing on small and medium-sized businesses (national chains are excluded).
- A £225,000 investment in enhanced street cleansing and public realm services.
- Feasibility work to assess demand for hotel accommodation.

The shopfront improvements could include new signage, canopies, lighting, or the restoration of traditional or historic features that have been lost over time.

I hope that this report has been helpful but if you have any further queries then please do not hesitate to contact me via the details below.

With best wishes,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Harry', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Cllr Harry Richardson

Leader of the Mid Suffolk Conservative Group

Conservative Councillor for Thurston ward*

Mid Suffolk District Council

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**Jointly with Green Councillor David Bradbury.*

Appendix: new waste collection pattern

Collection Calendar	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3
Refuse			
Recycling			
Food			
Garden			