

April 2026

Parish Report

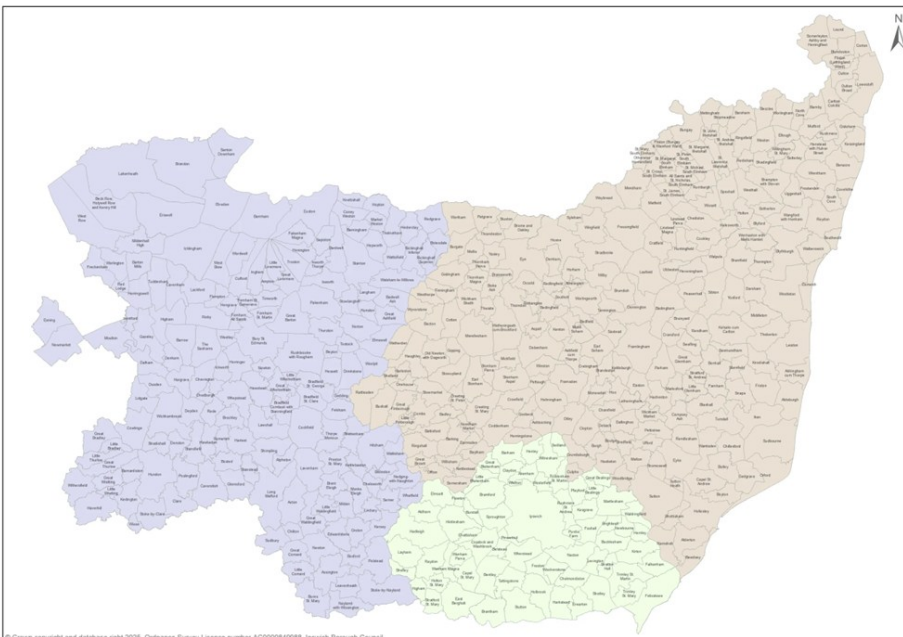
Cllr Andrew Stringer, Upper Gipping

Broadway House, Broad Road, Cotton, Stowmarket, IP14 4ND

07774 199061 - andrew.stringer@suffolk.gov.uk

Unitary Decision Announced by Government

On 25 March the government announced that it had chosen a three unitary model for Suffolk following the Local Government Reorganization process which will see upper tier authority Suffolk County Council and lower tier authorities like districts and boroughs abolished in two years. Last year the government asked Suffolk councils to submit proposals on how many unitary councils they thought the county should have in the future. Suffolk County Council submitted a case for a single unitary council (One Suffolk) and the district and borough councils submitted one for three councils, which was the option chosen by ministers. These plans will see the county split into three areas: Western Suffolk, Central and Eastern Suffolk and Ipswich and Southern Suffolk, which includes the county town and Felixstowe. Elections for the new councils will be held next May, with the new councillors shadowing existing councillors until the new authorities are 'vested' from 1 April 2028.



Motion of Support for Survivors of Sexual Harm Passed Unanimously

At council on 19 March, my group proposed a motion that the council release a statement of support for survivors of sexual harm and exploitation, on the basis that the near-constant media coverage of the

'Epstein files' was triggering for survivors of sexual harm of both genders, increasing the number of people seeking help. The motion also proposed that the council run a social media campaign signposting people to Survivors in Transition, a local charity which provides support and advice, and write to the government advocating for funding for support services. The motion was approved unanimously in the chamber. In the same meeting, motions were also passed in support of the Lowestoft flood barrier, and to look into how the costs of Traffic Regulation Orders (TROs) can be reduced. TROs are legal orders made by the council to amend speed limits, add road markings or make other changes to highways in the county.

Extra Funding for Public Rights of Way

On 24 March, Cabinet agreed to allocate an additional £3.9m of capital funding to repair structures on Suffolk's Public Rights of Way network. Structures such as bridges and boardwalks have a limited lifespan, and the council undertook a review to create a priority list of structures that need replacing or repairing in the next five years. The additional funding is needed because the amount of money usually allocated for these works is no longer enough due to the increased costs of building materials and labour, which have gone up 50% in the last five years. The priority list includes the Bailey Bridge between Walberswick and Southwold, the Fen Bridge over the Stour at Debenham and Hempyard Bridge at Ixworth. If structures become unsafe for walkers the council has to close the Public Right of Way, with each closure costing £1,200 for a six month period (if a path was closed for a year, it would cost £2,400). The Cabinet also heard about the King Charles III Coastal Path, which contrary to national media reports is not yet fully open: sections between Manningtree and Shotley Gate, and north of Southwold, will not be open until later in the summer.

Libraries Decision Scrutinised

At Scrutiny Committee on 11 March, last year's decision by the council to move the library service back in house was reviewed. The council's contract with Suffolk Libraries ended on 31 May 2025 and following that date, the county's 45 libraries and three mobile libraries came back into council control. Libraries' Friends Groups remain in place, with the funds they have raised for individual libraries staying separate from Suffolk County Council's funding. The meeting heard how Suffolk County Council and Suffolk Libraries had worked together to make the transition seamless for library users, although the transfer into council employment had placed a burden on library employees to undertake staff training, including on council platforms for IT, HR and procurement. In addition, the council had undertaken a restructure which had saved £340k in the 'central team'. No redundancies of front line library employees were made. During the meeting the council also laid out their plans to engage with library volunteers, governance systems for the new service and how the service would be celebrating the 2026 Year of Reading. The meeting also noted that borrowing of paper books was reducing, but that digital services such as eBooks and audiobooks were continuing to grow.

Support for Care Leavers

On 5 March, the council's Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Committee met to discuss services and support provides for young people in Suffolk leaving care. The council has to offer support to young people leaving care up to the age of 25, and at the most recent Ofsted inspection in June 2024 this was highlighted as one of the main areas where the council needed to improve. Since the inspection, the council has worked to improve planning with young people who are coming up to leaving care, making sure more young people knew what support was on offer, and making sure that support was accessible for them as they prepared for independence. In addition, the council received a visit from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government in April 2025 which focused on youth homelessness and found that the council needed to immediately review its pathways for care leavers who presented as homeless. In response to these findings, the council increased the number of advisors working with 17 year olds to prepare for leaving care, and making sure they are aware with the help they can get

such as reduction in council tax, and the 'Family Business' model the council uses to provide apprenticeships and jobs for young people who have been in care. The council has also nearly halved the number of care leavers in unsuitable accommodation, although they are still planning more work in this area, particularly for care leavers in custody.

If you want to know more about what help the council provides for young people leaving care, you can find it here: <https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/children-families-and-learning/children-in-care-and-care-leavers/services-for-young-people-leaving-care>

New Government Funding for Increasing Fuel Costs

Suffolk County Council has welcomed the additional £1.7m funding announced by the government to support households in the county facing increased oil heating costs. The council already provides cash payments to help residents with the cost of living through the Local Welfare Assistance Scheme, funded by the Household Support Fund. This scheme supports a range of essential costs, including utilities and energy, and has recently been updated to explicitly reference oil heating following the national announcement. From 1st April, Suffolk County Council will transition from the Household Support Fund to the Crisis Resilience Fund (CRF). This transition had already been planned prior to the new funding announcement, and will enable residents experiencing a financial shock or crisis - including sharp increases in oil heating costs - to continue accessing cash support via the Local Welfare Assistance Scheme, using the same application route as before.

Residents can access information about this process and how to apply here:

<https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/community-and-safety/communities/healthier/suffolk-local-welfare-assistance-scheme>

Parents Urged to Vaccinate Against Measles

The council is urging parents and carers in Suffolk to ensure their children are fully vaccinated against measles, mumps, rubella, and chickenpox, following a resurgence of measles cases nationally over the past two years. The country has seen a return of measles outbreaks linked to falling vaccination uptake, and as a result, the UK recently lost its World Health Organization measles elimination status.

Vaccination rates remain below the 95% coverage needed to prevent outbreaks, with almost one in five children starting primary school not fully protected against serious diseases. Measles is one of the most infectious diseases in the world and can lead to complications including pneumonia, meningitis, and brain inflammation.

Health leaders including the Public Health team at Suffolk County Council have advised that parents and carers will usually be contacted by their GP practice when their child is due a routine vaccination, but if a child has missed a vaccine and is over 18 months old, these can be scheduled at any time by contacting their GP practice to book an appointment. If a parent or carer is unsure what vaccinations their child has already received, they can check their Red Book, the NHS app or by speaking to their GP practice.

Highways Visit

Sophie our local highways engineer visited since our last meeting, looking into the flooding on Castle Hill, we have looked at this and it appears the drainage system of the whole hill seems to be blocked the entire length, this issue has been sent to the drainage team to scope the works required, as the issue does not involve internal flooding of dwellings this is unlikely to be the highest priority, We have spoken to the local landowner which has carried out some of the works required already. This should help with the water pooling at the bottom of the hill, but the water cascading down the hill may take a while to fix.

This is my last meeting as your County Councillor, as the election has now been called and the boundaries have changed due to the review of Councillor numbers (down from 74 to 70) means that Occold is no longer in Upper Gipping Division.

A very heartfelt Thank You to you all, it has been a pleasure to serve you, and wish Occold all the very best for the future..

All the best Andrew Stringer