Report to Parish Councils - Saxmundham & District Division

September and October 2026

Cllr Julia Ewart
Suffolk County Councillor for Saxmundham & District

Introduction

The past two months have seen a number of significant developments at Suffolk County Council, including major decisions at Full Council, continued progress in SEND improvement, investment in highways and emergency services, and the development of the administration's new Corporate Strategy.

For parish councils, many of these developments may appear remote from village life. However, issues such as SEND support, school transport, highways maintenance, flooding resilience and community assets have a direct impact on our towns and villages and continue to generate a considerable amount of correspondence from residents.

County Council Meeting - 8 October 2026

The principal meeting of County Council on 8 October considered several important reports and motions.

Support for Town and Parish Councils

One of the most positive outcomes for local communities was the overwhelming approval of a motion recognising the contribution made by Suffolk's town and parish councils and parish meetings. The motion commits the County Council to working constructively with local councils where there is evidence that services, assets or facilities may be delivered effectively at a local level. The motion was passed by 60 votes to one.

As local government continues to evolve, it is increasingly clear that parish councils are often best placed to understand and respond to local community needs. I was pleased to see this important role formally recognised.

Youth Justice Plan

Members approved the Suffolk Youth Justice Plan 2026-2027, which sets out how agencies will work together to support vulnerable young people and reduce the risk of offending.

Constitutional Changes

The Council also approved amendments to its Constitution as part of the ongoing development of governance arrangements under the current administration.

Emergency Services

Council approved a motion recognising the contribution made by emergency service personnel and volunteer responders throughout Suffolk. It is with regret that Fire Chief is now retiring. John Lacey will be very much missed having been with the service since 2020 as fire chief.

Children, Young People and SEND

The most significant development during October was confirmation that Government has approved Suffolk's plans for improving services for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). This represents recognition of progress being made following previous inspection concerns.

The Council has also launched consultation on proposals to develop and expand Family Hub services across Suffolk. These services aim to provide more joined-up support for children, young people and families.

My Priority: School Transport and EHCPs

One area I have personally raised with the administration is the opportunity presented by its new Corporate Strategy.

As the administration develops its ambitions for Suffolk over the coming years, I have asked that serious consideration be given to reviewing both the Home to School Transport Policy and the delivery of Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs).

In rural Suffolk, access to education should not be determined solely by geography or the availability of a bus route. I believe the Council should consider whether its transport policies are enabling children to attend the school that is right for them and their individual needs.

I have also urged the administration to continue improving the SEND assessment process so that children receive assessments, decisions and support in a timely manner and well in advance of any transition from primary to senior school. Whilst the recent Government endorsement of Suffolk's improvement programme is welcome, families will understandably judge success by their day-to-day experience of the service.

I intend to continue pursuing both issues as the administration's Corporate Strategy develops. Every child deserves access to the right education, timely assessments and the support they need to succeed.

Highways

September saw the completion of Suffolk's annual surface dressing programme.

The programme included:

- More than 140 kilometres of roads treated.
- Eighty-six sites completed across the county.
- Trials of new maintenance techniques and road repair technologies.
- New approaches to informing road users about works.

The County Council has also begun trialling innovative pothole-repair equipment as it seeks to improve the condition of the highway network.

Whilst residents will continue to raise concerns regarding potholes, drainage issues and verge maintenance, preventative works of this kind are intended to extend the life of roads and deliver better value for taxpayers.

Please ask your village representative to work with me to help secure the changes you would like to see. We are already progressing certain aspects, although progress has not been as forthcoming as I would have hoped on some of the commitments that have already been made. I have raised these concerns with Steve Merry, the Highways Lead for the NSIP works, particularly given the level of flexibility and tolerance that is so often required in delivering these projects.

Flooding and Community Resilience

Flood resilience continues to be an important area of work across Suffolk.

The Council has completed new natural flood management schemes near Debenham, designed to reduce flood risk and slow water flows during periods of heavy rainfall.

The Council has also supported Flood Action Week, encouraging residents to understand their flood risk and prepare for winter weather.

Given recent flooding events experienced by many communities, parish councils may wish to ensure that local resilience arrangements and emergency contacts are readily available. Please feel free to get information to residents. I am only too glad to be called if needed.

Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service

October saw the unveiling of a new fleet of 11 fire appliances as part of a £3.6 million investment in Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service.

Additional successes include:

- National recognition through shortlisting for two fire service awards.
- A Community Hero Award for Stowmarket Fire Station.
- Continued investment in operational capability and community engagement.

The contribution of retained firefighters remains particularly important to rural Suffolk and deserves recognition.

Skills, Employment and Infrastructure

The Council has announced a major skills programme expected to help up to 3,000 learners gain engineering and construction qualifications over the coming years. The initiative is linked to major infrastructure projects, including Sizewell C, and aims to maximise opportunities for local people.

Useful Emergency Contacts

As we enter the winter period, parish councils may find the following contacts useful.

Emergency Services (Immediate Danger to Life)
999

Environment Agency Floodline (24 hours)
0345 988 1188

Suffolk Highways
Flooding on roads, blocked drains, fallen trees and highway emergencies
0345 606 6171

Power Cuts and Dangerous Power Lines
105

Essex & Suffolk Water
0345 782 0999

Anglian Water Emergency Line
03457 145145

Environment Agency Incident Hotline
0800 80 70 60

Closing Remarks

The past two month, regardless of the hot summer, department have demonstrated the breadth of work undertaken by Suffolk County Council, from investment in highways and emergency services to continuing improvements in SEND provision and flood resilience. Equally important has been the recognition given by Full Council to the role played by town and parish councils in supporting their communities and delivering local solution.

As your County Councillor, I will continue to champion the interests of our towns and villages and to raise the concerns that residents bring to me. In particular, I will continue pressing the administration to use its new Corporate Strategy as an opportunity to review Home to School Transport and improve the timeliness of SEND assessments and EHCP decisions. These are issues which have a profound effect on children's lives and future opportunities and must remain a priority.

I remain grateful to the many parish councillors, clerks, volunteers and residents who 77u6take the time to share local concerns and work constructively for the benefit of their communities. Their knowledge, commitment and dedication remain one of Suffolk's greatest assets.

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