

# Parish Report May 2024

## Councillor

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### Information Updates

Cost of Living help and advice: <https://infoink.suffolk.gov.uk/kb5/suffolk/infoink/family.page?familychannel=6>

Benefits advice and support: <https://infoink.suffolk.gov.uk/kb5/suffolk/infoink/adult.page?adultchannel=0>

For information on supporting Ukrainian refugees in Suffolk, email: [refugeesupport@suffolk.gov.uk](mailto:refugeesupport@suffolk.gov.uk) or [ukrainesupport@communityactionsuffolk.org.uk](mailto:ukrainesupport@communityactionsuffolk.org.uk)

### Health Scrutiny

At Health Scrutiny Committee on 17 April, we heard from colleagues in the NHS about their digital integration work, trying to join up the different IT systems they use and to make information sharing easier between health and care providers. This is especially helpful given the UK's aging population. There was also a report from NSFT on mortality reporting between November 2023 and January 2024 – this relates to the deaths of current patients and those within six months of discharge, with their system of recording having recently been overhauled.

You may have read recent articles in the press about their failure to record such deaths correctly in the past. Finally, the committee reviewed an improvement plan produced by James Paget University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust following the CQC inspection of their maternity services in 2023. Maternity services were found to be inadequate during the inspection, and the report detailed the actions they were taking to address the areas where they needed to improve.

### New Independent Chair appointed to drive forward SEND reform

Suffolk County Council can today announce that Kathryn Boulton has been appointed as the new independent chair of the Local Area Partnership's SEND Improvement Board. Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) provision is delivered by the Local Area Partnership in Suffolk, which includes Suffolk County Council, NHS Suffolk and North-East Essex Integrated Care Board and NHS Norfolk and Waveney Integrated Care Board.

The SEND Improvement Board was set up in response to the inspection of SEND services in Suffolk in November last year by Ofsted and CQC and is a requirement of the Improvement Notice that will be issued to Suffolk by the Department for Education. Made up of senior leaders from the council and NHS, board members will oversee the implementation and review of plans and services aimed at improving the way SEND services are delivered in Suffolk. It will also ensure the successful delivery of the Priority Action Plan, which was co-produced following the inspection and has been agreed by the Department for Education. [You can read that plan online.](#)

The new chair of the board, Kathryn, has 37 years of experience across children's services. With an education background and success in several senior leadership roles, Kathryn has significant experience of transforming SEND services in local authorities and ensuring the voices and experiences of children and young people with SEND and their families are central to the design and delivery of SEND services.

In addition to Kathryn's appointment, the Local Area Partnership will receive an Improvement Notice from the Department for Education. This was an expected outcome after the Ofsted and CQC inspection. It means that advisors from the Department for Education and NHS England will work with the Local Area Partnership to support and monitor improvement plans until further notice.

## **New Government Funding for SEND Schools**

The council will be receiving an additional £10.9million from the Department for Education to create new specialist places for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities. The Department for Education also announced it was funding a new SEND school in Suffolk sponsored by the Unity Schools Partnership, which will provide 126 new places in Suffolk for pupils aged between three and 16 with severe learning difficulties. Earlier this month, the Chancellor also announced a new Alternative Provision (AP) free school, the SENDAT New AP Suffolk Free School, in West Suffolk. The sites for both schools are yet to be confirmed.

## **New Appointments in Children's Services**

As well as the council's new £4.4m investment in additional staff to improve SEND services (detailed in last month's report), two new appointments have been made to leadership. Sarah-Jane Smedmor will be the new permanent Director for Children's Services, with a start date of 8 July.

An Independent Chair for the new SEND Improvement Board has also been appointed, Kathryn Boulton, who will start in June and lead the SEND improvement the council needs to deliver following the poor Ofsted/CQC inspection in November 2023. The council submitted an action plan after the report was published which has been approved by Ofsted, CQC and the Department for Education.

## **Strategy for Care Leavers**

On Tuesday 23 April, Cabinet reviewed the Leaving Care Strategy which detailed the ways in which the council wants to improve the service it provides to young people leaving our care. The council acts as a 'corporate parent' to all children taken into care, and must always ask itself with every decision: 'would this be good enough for my child?'. Plans in the new strategy for young people leaving care include help with housing, employment, mentoring and extension of the current council tax exemption scheme for care leavers who are living outside of Suffolk.

The Leaving Care service offers support to all young people leaving care up to the age of 25, and care leavers regularly attend meetings at the council to provide feedback and ideas for improvement.

## **New Resurfacing Investment Gets Underway**

Residents across Suffolk are set to benefit from 421 newly surfaced roads this year which is almost double the number of roads completed last year. This is a result of the extra £10 million investment by the council into resurfacing roads, which was announced last May immediately after the local election result. 102 roads will be surface dressed, whilst a further 319 sites will benefit from a full machine resurfacing during the year. Surface dressing and machine resurfacing.

These treatments prolong the life of a road surface, remove potholes and level it out. During the last six months, Suffolk Highways has repaired over 9,000 potholes and resurfaced 41 roads, with a further 278 roads planned for resurfacing in this financial year. Having said this, winter weather always sees an increase in potholes and there is still a lot to do.

## **Share your thoughts on the importance of Nature in Suffolk**

A new survey has been launched to find out which aspects of nature in Suffolk are most important to you. Your responses will feed into Suffolk's Local Nature Recovery Strategy, a plan to help reverse the decline in nature across the county, and to connect and expand existing areas that are important for wildlife and the landscape.

- Nationwide, wildlife species have declined by 19% since 1970 ([State of Nature report](#))
- One in six species in Great Britain are at risk of extinction ([State of Nature report](#))
- Up to 70% of Suffolk's 22,000 ponds are neglected or abandoned ([Suffolk Wildlife Trust](#))
- Norfolk and Suffolk have over three times less ancient woodland than the national average ([Natural Capital Evidence Compendium for Norfolk and Suffolk](#))

To address this decline and to help nature recover, government has introduced legally-binding commitments. There are 48 of these Local Nature Recovery Strategies across the country, led in Suffolk by Suffolk County Council.

Together, they will form a national 'nature network', proposing actions such as the creation of wetlands, restoration of peatlands, planting of trees and hedgerows, and more sustainable management of existing woodlands and other habitats like grasslands.

Members of the public are invited to share their favourite nature spots to visit, what access is like, which habitats and species should be protected, and so on. You don't have to be a wildlife expert, but your thoughts will help the work to reverse the decline of nature in Suffolk.

Farmers, landowners and land managers are also encouraged to submit practical, achievable proposals to support nature conservation, as well as sharing how land is currently managed and any challenges faced applying for government funding schemes.

All responses will help build a picture across Suffolk to help protect and enhance our environment. You can share your thoughts in the Suffolk Local Nature Recovery Strategy Survey by visiting <https://www.nsnrp.org/get-involved>, which closes on 30 June 2024.

#### **At More Suffolk Homes Eligible for Energy Improvements**

More families will be able to secure free assistance to make their houses warmer and more energy efficient using the Warm Homes Suffolk scheme. Residents and landlords of eligible properties can apply for energy efficient measures such as insulation, solar panels or heat pumps, with average funding of £18,000 is available for homeowners, and £12,000 for landlords and their tenants. Warm Homes Suffolk has been funding home energy efficiency improvements for two years, with funding from the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero. To be eligible, the following conditions must be met:

- Homes must have an EPC rating of D, or below
- Homes are not heated by mains gas

And then either of the following conditions:

- Households have a combined pre-tax income of under £36,000 (this was previously £31,000)
- Homes are in a certain postcode (you can use this [pre-qualified postcode checker](#)), which includes parts of Beccles, Bungay, Bury St. Edmunds, Felixstowe, Great Cornard, Haverhill, Ipswich, Kessingland, Lowestoft, Mildenhall, Newmarket, Rushmere St Andrew, Saxmundham, Sudbury

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