

Lavenham Parish Council report by Robert Lindsay County Cllr 2.7.26

Legal challenge to three unitary decision

On Monday (30th June), I attended the emergency Cabinet meeting called by Reform's leader Cllr Michael Hadwen at which the Cabinet nodded through his decision to mount a judicial review. As of writing (Wed 1st July) I have just signed, along with colleagues from all opposition parties, a "call in" request to the Monitoring Officer to have this decision reviewed by Scrutiny Committee. I will let you know the outcome, however even if the call-in goes ahead, it is unlikely to prevent the judicial review being launched.

The legal challenge will cost up to £500k and that will have to come from the already tight reserves budget. It is far from clear that Reform can win this challenge and Cllr Hadwen himself has said his goal is to prevent any change from happening from the existing two-tier structure.

While I am not a big fan of the changes imposed on us, I can't help thinking that things have got too far down the road to change that now, but I may be wrong. The risk is that the change to three unitaries still goes ahead but that we are not ready because of the distraction caused by this legal action.

I also pointed out to Cllr Hadwen that Reform do not have a mandate to take this action which, if it wins, will prolong his term of office from two years to four years. This is because it formed no part of Reform's manifesto at the election. Cllr Hadwen said he had a mandate to make any decision because Reform won the election and that planning for three unitaries is going ahead in parallel with the action.

Post-16 Travel charging held flat for 2026-27

At Cabinet on Tuesday 16 June, the Council agreed to hold the charges for students flat for a second year.

- £1,050 for a mainstream seat
- £780 for students with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)
- The 50% discount remains in place for:
 - Students from low-income families receiving Free School Meals
 - Students with an EHCP or SEND (including those without an EHCP but unable to travel independently due to disability) who also receive Free School Meals

There are currently 30,471 pupils in Suffolk who are eligible for Free School Meals, a 91% increase since 2020.

Suffolk joins a Support Scheme for Apprenticeships

The UK employer apprenticeship levy is a payroll tax requiring businesses with an annual pay bill over £3 million to pay 0.5% of their payroll into a fund used for apprenticeship training. Norfolk has a scheme that allows such businesses to donate any of the levy they don't use themselves to smaller businesses in the County that might want apprentices but can't afford them. Suffolk has now joined this scheme.

Businesses in Suffolk who want advice on apprenticeships and skills can contact Apprenticeships Suffolk by email on apprenticeships@suffolk.gov.uk

£3.6 Million Investment in New Fire Engines

Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service has invested over £3million in a new fleet of eleven fire engines across the county. The new engines will be active at fire stations from November.