

Report for Lavenham Parish Council by Robert Lindsay County Cllr 8.1.26

New Funding for Buses...

Suffolk has been awarded £27m of funding for bus services from the government's Local Authority Bus Grant (LABG), this can be used for routes, ticketing or improving infrastructure like bus stops and shelters. Previously known as the Bus Services Improvement Grant, communities in Suffolk will be able to suggest improvements in their area and 'bid' for funding via the Suffolk on Board website: <https://www.suffolkonboard.com/>

Previous funding rounds in past two years were far smaller - of the order of only £5m – but, as you know, it secured extra services on the route between Sudbury and Bury via Lavenham and now a new daily peak time route between Hadleigh and Stowmarket is in the offing thanks to the earlier round of money. Our area is still very underserved by bus routes so worth thinking about what extra services or extra bus stop facilities would best serve Lavenham residents.

And Sustainable Travel

The council has also been awarded just over £12m from Active Travel England to promote sustainable travel in the county. This can be used to invest in footpaths, cycle lanes and other infrastructure. Examples of how this funding has been used recently include pedestrian crossings in Bridge Street and College Road by Ipswich waterfront and improved cycle routes including from Ipswich Hospital to the waterfront area, Nacton Road in Ipswich, Main Road in Martlesham, and within Woodbridge as part of the town's current active travel project. Again worth thinking about any improvements that could be made in Lavenham for pedestrians and cyclists.

Suffolk Conservatives to decide whether to delay County elections again

The County's Conservative leader has called another extraordinary meeting for next Monday 12th January. This meeting is called to debate whether to delay County Council elections for the second year running. The Government announced just before Christmas that it will do so where County Councils request it. The original delay was agreed to allow for the mayoral election to take place at the same time as the County elections. But then the mayoral election was suddenly postponed by the government.

However, some of the funding attached to the mayoral office is due to be given the interim authorities next financial year and in future years. If this further delay is agreed, it would mean that new strategic funding would be given to Suffolk in years 2026, 2027 and 2028, based on a mandate last given by the public in 2021. My political group is lobbying the County Council not to ask the government for any further delays in elections.

Protecting Suffolk's Rivers

At council on Thursday 11th December, my political group proposed a motion to strengthen protection for rivers in the county via the Universal Declaration of the

Rights of Rivers which include the right to flow naturally, be free from pollution or contamination and the right to recover from environmental harm. Unfortunately, the Conservative group opted to vote against the motion and it was not carried.

SEND progress still slow, finds scrutiny committee

On Thursday 4th December, the Council's Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Committee convened to scrutinise progress on the action plan for improvement to Suffolk's Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) services. The action plan was developed following a poor inspection report from Ofsted and CQC in November 2023.

Council officers and Cabinet members for children's services joined the meeting and acknowledged that although progress had been made to clear the backlog of EHCPs and improve the waiting times to produce them and review them annually, many families had not yet felt the benefit of improvements the Council and health partners were trying to embed.

Some issues, like the shortage of speech and language therapists, were a national issue rather than specific to Suffolk.

The government's Schools white paper, which is expected to include an overhaul of the SEND system nationally, is expected soon in 2026.

Members of the Committee included education professionals and parents of children with special educational needs who expressed their concern that the Council was still not providing a good enough service to Suffolk families.

More Warm Homes Grants funding

Residents and landlords are urged to apply quickly for £1.38million in Warm Homes Local Grant funding secured at the end of November last year as the funding must be allocated by the end of March 2026.

It is only available to those with household income at or below £36k pa. and homes with an EPC below C. (you can find this out when you apply).

You can find out more and apply using this link: <https://www.warmhomessuffolk.org/>

Winter warmth Packs

Suffolk County Council and East Suffolk council have teamed up to provide Winter Warmth Packs to help vulnerable residents stay warm and healthy at home even if they are struggling with rising living costs. Referrals are via community groups, food banks, GP surgeries or hospitals and each pack includes items such as thermal hats, gloves, blankets and gilets, tailored as necessary – for example, children's winter coats can be included. Although the Warm Homes Healthy People programme is delivered by East Suffolk Council, it is a county-wide programme.

Helping Older Drivers Stay Safe

Suffolk's Fire and Rescue Service are holding workshops at fire stations around the county to advise older people on how they can stay safe while driving. Nationally, one in four car drivers killed on the roads last year were aged 70 or over, and as a rural county, many residents are reliant on cars to stay independent. The sessions are planned at the following venues for 11am-1pm:

- Tuesday 13 January – Woodbridge Fire and Police Station
- Wednesday 14 January – Stradbroke Fire Station
- Tuesday 27 January – Wrentham Fire and Police Station
- Wednesday 28 January – Ixworth Fire Station
- Tuesday 10 February – Holbrook Fire Station

To book a free place, please visit <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/o/suffolk-fire-rescue-service-road-safety-86298781223?msocid=1b58e35a30906c973b40f56031016d19>