Lavenham Parish report by Robert Lindsay County Cllr 4.11.26

Bus issues

I have been copied in to emails between your Clerk and the TMS bus company over delayed/cancelled buses and lack of timetables and I have had much correspondence with TMS and the County Council.

Buses were deregulated in Suffolk, and the rest of the country in 1986, even though, in my view, bus routes are a natural monopoly. The County Council is therefore unable to do anything about a private bus company's performance on services that the county does not subsidise.

Sadly, the County Council no longer publishes timetables, leaving it to the bus companies.

Passengers with complaints should keep a careful record of times and dates of delayed services and raise it in the first instance with the company. If the Parish Clerk is copied in, he can perhaps keep a dossier of evidence which he and I can then use to try to escalate pressure if necessary.

Water Street, Bolton Street, Prentice Street, Barn Street

I have asked Highways to investigate all four streets to see if they can be brought forward in the resurfacing/surface treatment schedule.

County freezes recruitment as predicted overspend soars to £11m

Staff at the county have this week (2.11.26) received a memo saying that the estimated overspend for the year has increased from £7.8m to £11m. An immediate recruitment freeze has been put in place along with tougher procedures to control spending.

County to consult on closing up to 12 of its 32 Best Start family hubs

On 15th October, the Council's Cabinet voted to consult on changes to its early help services provided by Family Hubs (formerly known as children's centres).

The plan is to use existing libraries and other community spaces to provide some downgraded family services – known as "Best Start Network Sites" - replacing the hubs that will close, saving the council £425k a year in property costs.

The County argues that outreach work and staff numbers will actually increase, however there is concern that many people without access to transport will find it even harder to get help.

Special committee to look at county's legal breaches when launching its judicial review

Back in June, council leader Michael Hadwen, took the decision to launch a judicial review of the Government's decision on unitary councils in Suffolk.

In September the Council's monitoring officer took the step of publishing what is known as a "section 5A report" – a very rare public warning that Suffolk's Reform administration broke the law over the way it the review was launched.

There were two breaches, the officer found. One was that the written record of the leader's decision was not published as rapidly as the law required and the second was that documents asked for the by scrutiny committee were not provided within ten days.

Councillors on the scrutiny committee have now voted to set up a task and finish group to look into these breaches and recommend any actions. Their report will likely be tabled at the February 2027 Scrutiny Committee meeting.

Fire fighter recruitment surges following Dunwich blaze

Following the wildfire at Dunwich Heath this summer, Suffolk fire service has seen a record number of volunteer applications for its most recent on-call firefighter recruitment campaign. The service received 219 applications, more than double the 70 to 100 applications it would typically receive across all six annual recruitment campaigns combined.

Suffolk Fire Chief retires and calls for more investment

Suffolk Fire chief Jon Lacey, who has just announced his retirement, warned MPs at a committee on Tuesday 27th October that cutbacks meant there were too few firefighters and that rural services in particular had to depend on "on call" firefighters with day jobs.

He said many were being sent to "another fire or back to the fire at Dunwich only a few hours after they had just left…You can only rotate them around a shift so many times."