

# **Cllr Matthew Hicks 2025 Annual Report for the Thredling Division**

## **Suffolk County Council confirms 2025/26 budget**

SCC has confirmed how it will spend its money in the forthcoming financial year - an £803.7 million plan focused on protecting essential services and supporting the county's most vulnerable residents. The council's budget for 2025/26 was approved with an emphasis on meeting rising demand for children's and adult care services. For every £1 the council spends in the next financial year, 77 pence will go directly toward services that support the health and wellbeing of people in Suffolk. The remaining 23 pence will fund other critical areas such as fire and rescue, highway maintenance, climate initiatives, waste management and bus services, as well as the infrastructure, staff, and technology required to keep services running efficiently. This is another budget set in challenging times. Economic growth remains sluggish, public finances are under pressure from rising demand and global uncertainty continues to create financial instability. But it is precisely in times like these that we must stay focused on our responsibility to the people of Suffolk. We are committed to delivering high-quality public services that make a real and lasting difference in people's lives. We will continue to prioritise those who need our support the most, including vulnerable children and adults who require assistance to live independently. The council's budget will increase by 6.7%, from £752.9 million in 2024/25 to £803.7 million in 2025/26. Despite a slight uplift in Government funding for local authorities, rising costs and growing demand have required the council to set significant savings targets to balance the books. The council has approved £10.9 million in new savings, which will focus on restructuring and transforming how services are delivered. This follows £17.5 million in savings approved in the previous year, bringing total savings for the 2025/26 financial year to £28.4 million. Suffolk County Council's share of Council Tax will rise by 4.99% next year, which includes a 2.99% general increase and a further 2% dedicated wholly to helping meet the rising costs of social care. We know that many of our residents are feeling the pressures of rising costs. That's why it's our duty to ensure that every pound of public money is spent wisely and delivers the best possible value for our residents.

## **One new council is the best option for Suffolk**

SCC has approved an interim plan for local government reorganisation in Suffolk which with a full business case submitted in September 2025, following extensive engagement with residents, town and parish councils, businesses and local organisations. The key benefits of one council are:

- Simpler for residents – one council would make it easier to understand
- Clearer accountability – there would be less confusion over who is responsible for what
- Better use of funding – a more coherent, strategic, financially sustainable, county-wide approach to budgeting
- Safer services - less risk of breaking up critical services like social care and better alignment with other agencies like health and the police
- Better alignment of services – since everything is under one roof, services can be more easily coordinated, creating opportunities to improve services for residents
- More efficient decision-making – with just one council, decisions can be made more quickly
- Connected to and empowering residents - providing both the most straightforward and accountable democratic leadership with enhanced neighbourhood and community engagement
- Stronger leadership – a single, visible and accountable body providing a clear strategic voice for Suffolk.

When people visit Suffolk, it's hard not to fall in love with it. Indeed, if you're lucky enough to live and work here, that love grows strong, anchoring people, families and businesses for generations. Whether you're looking for a place for your children to go to school, a forever home or a location from which to do business, Suffolk gives you options. Sea views, rolling fields, big skies, quiet

villages, market towns and bustling urban centres. Although different from each other, our areas exist as part of a coherent and historic geographical area. We are proud of Ipswich, our county town. But so are we of the many other places, large and small, that make Suffolk the cohesive place it is. There is, without doubt, a spirit or force that's hard to describe that connects and unites our great and special county. Analysis carried out nationally by the County Council Network has demonstrated that a single unitary council for Suffolk would have a recurring financial benefit of almost £26 million a year – with the net benefit after 5 years being over £103 million. All the evidence shows that one council for Suffolk is the only viable option to deliver significant savings that can be reinvested into frontline services, financial sustainability and maximum clarity and accountability. This is clearly demonstrated in our interim plan and will be expanded upon in the final business case in September. The latest independent analysis makes it clear that having a single council for Suffolk will save the most money which can be reinvested into frontline public services that benefit residents, while having three councils would cost the taxpayer more than the current 50-year-old system. The funding could be reinvested in services like pothole repairs, waste collection and disposal, housing, social care, planning, leisure, school placements and travel and street cleaning. There's been talk of creating three unitary councils for Suffolk, including a Greater Ipswich. But that model is without credibility and is financially ruinous. We want to deliver the best possible opportunity to Ipswich and all our market towns and rural communities. The only way to do that is as one Suffolk. A Greater Ipswich would be in financial peril from day one, threatening the very services we want to protect. But this isn't just about money, it's about people too. A single council will absolutely be able to reflect and serve the whole of Suffolk, and our plans will clearly show how local priorities and residents' voices can and will be central to decision making. If we're going to create a truly sustainable and effective council structure for Suffolk, then one new council is not just the only viable option, but also the best one.

### **200 new specialist SEND places for Suffolk**

The creation of 200 new specialist places across the county for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) was approved by SCC's cabinet. An extra 100 places could open this year, and another 100 new places by September 2026, with future plans being drawn up. These places will be spread across Suffolk and tailored to meet need and demand. The plan presented to cabinet outlines how £18.6million could best be spent to support the growing population of SEND children and young people who need specialist education. Over the last five years, Suffolk pupils accessing special schools and units attached to mainstream schools has increased by over 40%. The proposal includes £3million to be spent on small groups and units in mainstream schools from September 2025 and £12million to be spent on developing satellite units linked to existing special schools across Suffolk from September 2026. The remaining £3.6million is earmarked for further SEND provision. In the past five years, 1,025 new specialist SEND places across Suffolk have been agreed. We know the importance of making sure that children are in the right provision for their needs at the right time.

### **Council continues to oppose pylons in final round of consultations**

SCC maintains that more can, and should, be done to improve National Grid's plans for their Norwich to Tilbury pylon project. A final round of consultation for the project in Suffolk has now been completed ahead of an expected Development Consent Order application later this year. SCC has welcomed a series of changes to the latest set of plans, evidence that National Grid has listened to some of the council's concerns and those of local communities. However fundamental differences remain, with the council remains clear that offshore and undergrounding solutions should be priorities for the scheme. We are bitterly disappointed that pylons are still the go-to solution for this project, and particularly those destined to cut across the Waveney Valley's valued landscape, rather than going underground, or ideally offshore. We still firmly contend that less damaging alternatives to the project have not been properly considered. Despite making clear our overall opposition to the

scheme, we have influenced some alterations proposed by National Grid, such as the undergrounding of smaller pylons, owned by UK Power Networks in some places. At the next stage of the process, when the Planning Inspectorate is presented with the plans, we will continue to pursue our preferences for no pylons at all, to make the scheme better and safer for our communities. SCCs response to the latest, and previous, consultations can be found on our website.

### **Arts organisations and museums across Suffolk get £500,000 funding boost**

Thirty-three arts organisations and museums from across Suffolk have been awarded funding from Suffolk County Council's £500,000 Culture Project Fund. The successful projects range in size and scope, and support an array of different people across Suffolk. Examples include promoting performing arts in Sudbury with the Quay Theatre, environmental events at Dunwich Museum, and an education and arts project to address racial inequalities in Ipswich. The successful bids range from £1,000 to £27,000. The new fund, which was launched last year to boost cultural activity across the county, attracted 131 applications, requesting a total of £2 million in funding. The quality of applications was exceptionally high, and more than 60 projects scored 'excellent' or 'outstanding' against the assessment criteria. Following a rigorous selection process, a panel of experts from across the arts, heritage, and community sectors reviewed 62 shortlisted applications. This resulted in 33 successful bids. As well as some higher-profile organisations, it's wonderful that lots of smaller projects, which often get overlooked for funding, will also benefit.

### **All 45 libraries back under SCC care and control.**

The decision, made at the Cabinet meeting, will ensure continued access to high-quality, community-focused library services across the county. As part of this move, the council plans to:

- Keep all 45 libraries open
- Maintain opening hours
- Create job security for all frontline staff
- Secure a sustainable future for Suffolk's library services

In addition to continuing its core library services, the council is investing £200,000 in mobile libraries, with a further £157,000 for new books and to replace public computers in libraries across Suffolk. Libraries have long been at the heart of Suffolk's communities. They are essential spaces for learning, connection, and support, and the council is committed to ensuring they remain hubs that bring people together. Looking to the future, SCC envisions libraries becoming even more integrated into the wider community, serving as convenient access points for a range of essential council services. This includes providing information and support around Adult Social Care, offering health and social care services, facilitating Family Hub activities, and promoting digital inclusion. The aim is to make it easier for residents to access vital services and support, all within the welcoming, familiar setting of their local library. SCC would like to express its sincere gratitude to Suffolk Libraries, who have run the library contract for the past 12 years. Their passion and hard work have been integral to the success of library services in the county, and the council appreciates all they have done to support local communities. We look forward to welcoming library staff back into the county council and continuing to support them in delivering outstanding services to the public. We would also like to thank the 1,250 volunteers whose commitment has been essential in delivering high-quality services to residents across Suffolk. As we transition the library service back under council control, we remain fully committed to working with our volunteers. Their invaluable contributions will continue to play a central role in the future of our libraries, and we are excited to explore new opportunities to expand volunteer involvement. The library service will officially return to Suffolk County Council control on 1 June 2025.

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