

Suffolk County Council Report – Constable Division

August 2026

By Darius Laws

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A heatwave, poor crop yields (with grapes perhaps being the exception), a hosepipe ban and dangerous field fires mean that the summer of 2026 is unlikely to be forgotten in a hurry. As a backbench councillor, I am part of a group that continues to support practical measures to protect Suffolk's environment. We will also be closely scrutinising the Reform administration's decisions on climate and environmental policy. Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service deserves particular praise for its hard work in tackling the recent field fires, especially given how close some of them came to Sizewell.

Our group is also keeping a close eye on the council administration's claims of savings. Unfortunately, our efforts to ensure that supporting evidence is published alongside headline-grabbing savings figures were rejected at a recent Full Council meeting.

Road defects continue to be inspected and repaired, clearly the state of our roads isn't a Suffolk-only problem, and I do despair at the UK's inability to 'manage the basics'. I have impressed upon officers the importance of maintaining road markings, including ensuring that yellow lines remain visible rather than gradually fading away.

Suffolk awarded over half a million pounds for bus franchising study

Suffolk County Council has secured £564,000 from the Department for Transport (DfT) to carry out a full feasibility study into bus franchising across the county.

The funding follows the introduction of franchised services in Greater Manchester and similar studies in a number of other authorities. Suffolk is among the first rural councils to explore whether greater public control over routes, fares and service standards could improve outcomes for passengers.

Options to be considered include:

- A single countywide franchise covering all of Suffolk
- A joint Suffolk-Norfolk franchise to improve cross-border connectivity and efficiency
- Three franchises aligned with proposed Local Government Reorganisation boundaries
- Smaller franchises focused on key towns, corridors and areas of demand
- Hybrid approaches that combine elements of different models

Franchising would allow the council to determine where services operate, how frequently they run and what fares are charged. Supporters argue this creates networks designed around the needs of passengers and communities, rather than purely commercial considerations.

Importantly, the DfT funding means this work can be undertaken at no additional cost to Suffolk taxpayers. The study will include consultation with residents, bus operators, local

councils, businesses and other stakeholders, with details of the engagement programme to be announced as the project progresses.

Suffolk County Council plans £18.9 million investment to expand SEND support across the county

A report to Cabinet in July recommended allocating £18.9 million of government High Needs Capital Funding to expand specialist SEND provision across Suffolk between 2026 and 2030. The investment aims to help more children access the support they need closer to home, reducing pressure on the SEND system and improving outcomes for families. In recent years, Suffolk County Council has already created around 170 specialist places in mainstream schools and a further 289 places through special school expansions and satellite provision.

However, demand continues to grow. The number of children and young people with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) rose by 17% in the past year, from 10,292 in April 2025 to 12,018 in April 2026.

The proposed investment would deliver:

- 168 new specialist places in secondary schools through bases linked to mainstream schools
- 80 additional places through satellite provision attached to existing special schools
- £2 million to support inclusion in mainstream schools
- £2 million for improvements and adaptations to mainstream school buildings
- £1 million to develop specialist post-16 provision across Suffolk

Wherever possible, the council plans to use existing school buildings, helping new provision to be delivered more quickly and cost-effectively. The programme will focus on areas of greatest need, particularly for children with Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) needs and Communication and Interaction needs, including autism. Increasing local provision should reduce the need for long journeys to school, improve placement stability and lessen reliance on costly independent and out-of-county placements. The council believes the investment will help create a more sustainable SEND system while ensuring children and young people receive the right support in the right place.

Shop owners and hospitality venues to benefit from Council-backed expert high streets support

Backed by Suffolk County Council, the initiative will offer 75 businesses a package of one-to-one advice, practical workshops, funding opportunities and peer networking designed to help high streets thrive.

Small independent businesses are at the heart of Suffolk's market towns, and those lucky villages which still have shops and services. The programme has been developed to help those businesses become more resilient, adapt to changing customer expectations and build long-term growth. Interested businesses can find out more about the programme and register here: <https://www.newangliagrowthhub.co.uk/suffolks-high-streets-matter/>

Miscellaneous & Contact details:

Finally, thank you for taking the time to read this.

Alongside dealing with day-to-day casework and helping residents find the right support, I have also been working behind the scenes on water safety matters and have helped secure additional yellow lines in Dedham to deter irresponsible parking.

With the number of vehicles using our roads continuing to grow, I remain concerned about both the damage being caused to our ancient country lanes and the safety of residents, cyclists, and pedestrians. That is why I did not hesitate to support the introduction of 7.5-tonne weight restrictions on some of our lanes. I also have serious concerns about the impact of construction traffic should the pylons project proceed.

I wish I had £1 for every time I have been contacted about wheelie bins. In truth, until local government is reorganised, waste collection remains the responsibility of your District Council. I must admit I miss the simpler days when we had one bin collected every week. Any feedback on the new collection system should be directed to your District Councillor, although I would also be very interested to hear your views.

You can email me on darius.laws@suffolk.gov.uk and I use WhatsApp: 07786 007 560