

SCC NEWSLETTER - DECEMBER 2025

Suffolk Fostering Christmas film highlights what it means to belong

With the need to recruit more foster carers as pressing as ever, audiences will be introduced to a moving new film that captures the essence of family, tradition, and hope.

The film's story follows a young boy as he joins his foster family in the annual tradition of selecting and decorating their Christmas tree.

Among the twinkling lights and handmade ornaments, he discovers family photographs from years past – something that leads him to reflect on his own journey and sense of belonging. Observing this, the foster carers' daughter offers him a heartfelt gift, an act of kindness that restores his hope and affirms the warmth of acceptance.

With its poignant narrative and festive backdrop, the film is a celebration of resilience, compassion, and the enduring spirit of the festive season.

“We believe every child deserves a place where they can truly belong – and it’s a responsibility we all share to make sure they’re given the very best start in life. By choosing to foster with your local council, you help keep Suffolk children close to the people, places, and communities they already call home. You can give a child a place to belong, to grow and to thrive.” Cllr Bobby Bennett, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People’s Services

Through initiatives that champion care, compassion, and opportunity, Suffolk County Council continues to work towards a future where every child feels valued and supported. This new film serves as a reminder that belonging is at the heart of hope – and through fostering, we can help make that hope a reality.

The filming location was provided by Rougham Estate, while Offset Films produced the film. **Simon Eddell, Estate Manager at Rougham Estate, said:** “It’s a small contribution, but one that we are delighted to be part of in order to raise awareness of a significant cause. We hope it helps many children.”

To find out more about fostering with Suffolk County Council, visit: www.fosterandadopt.suffolk.gov.uk

Inspectorate satisfied with Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service's improvement progress

In a letter received this week following an October revisit, inspectors recognised early positive change across leadership, governance and organisational culture, supported by a comprehensive action plan developed with staff and representative bodies.

Inspectors also noted the significant investment and support from Suffolk County Council - totalling £1.6 million over two years, which has enabled new posts, development programmes and organisational reforms to be put in place.

While acknowledging that meaningful cultural improvement takes time, the inspectorate confirmed it is satisfied with the service's progress to date.

Since the inspection last year, Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service, has:

- Secured £1.6m investment from Suffolk County Council to support improvement.
- Recruited nine new posts, with eight further roles in progress.
- Developed a comprehensive 37-goal improvement plan addressing all recommendations.
- Introduced new governance boards and improved oversight of progress.
- Delivered leadership development, training and 360-degree feedback programmes.
- Increased staff engagement through surveys, feedback processes and enhanced internal communications.
- Commissioned external peer support and challenge to promote learning and transparency.

To read the letter from HMICFRS in full, please visit: [Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service: Cause of concern revisit letter - His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services](#).

New Sizewell C skills bursary open to applications

Managed by Suffolk County Council, the bursary is designed to remove barriers to training and employment, ensuring that local people can gain the skills needed for Sizewell C and other high-quality jobs in the county.

The fund will provide £15,000 every year for the next decade, with individual bursaries of up to £1,000 available. Applications must be supported by the learner's training provider. The bursary can help with essential costs such as travel, accommodation, childcare, specialist equipment, study materials, PPE or uniforms, and short upskilling courses not funded by government, like a CSCS (Construction Skills Certification Scheme) card.

Full details of eligibility and how to apply are available at <https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/business/supporting-employers-training-your-workforce/sizewell-c-skills-funds>

Suffolk secures more than £26 million bus funding over three years

Millions of pounds of investment is to take place in Suffolk's bus network over three years following allocation of Government funding.

Services, ticketing, and infrastructure will all benefit under the package worth nearly £27 million between 2026 and 2029.

Suffolk County Council will receive a total of £26,813,760 under the Local Authority Bus Grant (LABG).

This funding will enable the continuation and expansion of new and improved services introduced over the past two years through LABG support and its predecessor, the Bus Services Improvement Grant (BSIP), many of which were shaped by community feedback.

Suffolk will receive:

- 2026/27 - £8,849,119
- 2027/28 - £8,937,920
- 2028/29 - £9,026,721

The funding is split into two areas.

Revenue investment will focus on:

- Maintaining and growing enhanced services based on local suggestions.
- Increasing publicity and travel information to help residents make informed choices.

Capital funding will deliver:

- Renewal and expansion of Real Time Passenger Information across Suffolk.
- Improved ticketing options and accessibility in partnership with bus operators.
- Investigations into bus priority measures to reduce journey times and encourage modal shift.
- Upgraded bus stops with new shelters, better footway links, and accessibility enhancements—many suggested by local communities.

Local authorities will have flexibility to use LABG funding to meet local needs—whether by reducing fares, introducing new routes, investing in zero-emission buses, or improving bus stops and stations.

Last July Suffolk County Council announced a £2.8m investment in new bus routes and improved services following announcement of LABG funding of £8 million for 2025-26. As well as new routes, some services gained increased frequency and a Sunday schedule added.

Alongside the £2.8m revenue for delivering new or enhanced services, the county council also [previously announced £5.2m of capital funding from the DfT](#) for new and improved bus stops, bus stations, bus priority measures or vehicle upgrades.

For more details of public transport in Suffolk go to the [Suffolk On Board](#) website.

SEND data shows improvement, but impact not felt by everyone, committee hears

The progress of improvements to special educational needs and disabilities provision in Suffolk was discussed at Education Scrutiny Committee on Thursday <4 December>. The committee, made up of councillors from all parties and non-elected independent members, such as parent governors, quizzed health and county council leaders on the progress, plans and challenges within SEND reform. The last time SEND was discussed at Education Scrutiny was June 2024.

Progress reported to the committee included:

- Significant improvement in the timeliness of Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs). By January, timeliness will be well above the national average of plans issued within 20 weeks. (Approximately 50% compared to 3.8% November 2023)
- Issuing more Education, Health and Care Plans than ever before. In November, 364 plans completed, compared to 186 November 2024. An increase of 65%.
- The timeliness of Annual Reviews has also improved, with 892 completed in November - compared to 775 last November

The committee also heard how the Department for Education continues to monitor and track improvement. The results of a recent stocktake visit by officers from the Department for Education is due shortly.

Despite positive evidence, officers were clear that improvement is not yet being felt by all families and reiterated that a robust, detailed and deliverable plan remains in place to keep driving reform at pace.

Acknowledgement was given that work to improve SEND is complex and costly, working across many sectors and against a backdrop of a broken national SEND system. Suffolk also faces rising demand with an increase of 22% more Education, Health and Care Plans over the year.

Discussions also included the caseloads of staff, appropriate training including staff visiting education settings and recent investment in staff recruitment.

Reform of SEND is being driven by the Local Area Inclusion Plan, which is delivered by the SEND Local Area Partnership made up of Suffolk County Council, the NHS Suffolk and North East Essex Integrated Care Board (ICB) and NHS Norfolk and Waveney ICB, and education settings. There are five priorities; belonging and inclusion, quality of Education, Health and Care Plans, access to provision, preparation for adulthood and engagement and communication.

The committee will now agree a set of recommendations. The papers are available to view [here](#).

Loft insulation scammers ordered to pay £48,891 after targeting vulnerable Suffolk residents

Riva Surveyors Ltd has been ordered to pay £48,891 in fines and compensation, while senior salesman Justin Brason received a suspended prison sentence for his part in the scam.

Riva Surveyors Ltd (previously known as Riba Surveyors Ltd) and Justin Brason, aged 45, of Brambling Close, Stowmarket, appeared separately at Ipswich Crown Court on 9 December 2025 for sentencing, following an investigation led by Suffolk County Council's Trading Standards team.

Between July 2019 and February 2020, the company cold-called or visited elderly homeowners across Suffolk, Essex, Cambridgeshire and Norfolk, claiming to offer free loft inspections.

Once inside the properties, "surveyors" falsely reported serious roof defects such as damp, mould or infestations, and urged householders to install spray foam insulation at vastly inflated prices. Victims were told the work was urgent and that their roofs were structurally unsound if left untreated.

In reality, the spray foam insulation sold was unnecessary and, in some cases, unsuitable for the properties, with an expert witness later confirming that the reported problems were exaggerated or entirely fabricated. The insulation could also reduce property value and make it harder to sell or remortgage.

Many victims were elderly and living alone. Out of 20 affected consumers, six went ahead with the work, suffering significant financial losses. Two victims later had to remove the insulation at additional cost so they could remortgage or sell their homes.

Riva Surveyors Ltd pleaded guilty to 21 counts of misleading actions under the Consumer Protection from Unfair Trading Regulations 2008. Brason pleaded guilty to eight counts

under the same legislation. His later attempt to withdraw his guilty plea was rejected by the court in September 2025.

Sentencing is as follows:

Riva Surveyors Ltd:

- Fined £850 for each of 21 offences, a total of £17,850
- Ordered to pay £31,021 in compensation to affected consumers
- Combined total liability: £48,891, to be paid within 12 months
- No prosecution costs awarded due to the judge prioritising victim compensation

Justin Brason:

- 12 months' imprisonment, suspended for 18 months
- Sentenced as 12 months for each of his eight offences, to run consecutively, reflecting that the judge considered each offence to be equally serious
- Ordered to pay £1,500 compensation, to be paid at £75 per month from February 2026
- 10 rehabilitation activity days
- 200 hours of unpaid work

The judge noted that culpability and harm were high but accepted that there had been no further complaints since the investigation began. As the company is now largely dormant, securing compensation for consumers was described as "a good result."

Suffolk Trading Standards' investigation was supported by the National Trading Standards Tri Region Investigation Team (TRIT) due to the scale of the offending across multiple counties.

Spray foam insulation is not always suitable for retrofitting in homes and homeowners are advised to seek independent advice before proceeding. Those wishing to find reputable traders can use schemes such as Suffolk Trusted Trader, Norfolk Trusted Trader, or the Essex Buy With Confidence scheme – all endorsed by their local Trading Standards department.

£12m Active Travel funding over four years announced for Suffolk

Suffolk County Council has been awarded more than £12 million over four years by Active Travel England to continue its work promoting sustainable travel.

Active Travel England (ATE) works with local authorities and other bodies to help them put in place infrastructure and facilities that make it easier for more people to walk, wheel and cycle, more often, on local journeys.

It has awarded Suffolk a total of £12,537,098 for the period 2026/27 to 2029/30 to invest in footpaths, infrastructure, and cycle lanes.

In Spring 2023 ATE awarded SCC £7.9 million to develop active travel schemes, followed later that year by £1.495m as part of the then-government's national walking and cycling Social Prescribing pilot.

A further £3.7 million active travel funding was awarded in February this year.

The money has been used in a variety of ways, including most recently new pedestrian crossings in Bridge Street and College Road by Ipswich Waterfront. Improved cycle routes include from Ipswich Hospital to the Waterfront area, Nacton Road in Ipswich, Main Road in Martlesham, and within Woodbridge as part of the town's active travel project.

The latest ATE award for future funding to Suffolk is part of [a funding package for councils in England](#) totalling more than £626 million.

The announcement comes days after the Department for Transport announced it was awarding Suffolk nearly £27 million to run and enhance [bus services and infrastructure](#) between 2026 and 2029.

One Suffolk best for most vulnerable, say county's safeguarding leaders

Two of the county's most experienced practitioners in adults and children's safeguarding are publicly endorsing the proposal for a single unitary authority in Suffolk – saying it offers the strongest protection for vulnerable people across the county.

As the government consultation on Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) reaches its halfway point, two of Suffolk's most experienced safeguarding figures have given their backing to the One Suffolk plan.

Anthony Douglas, Independent Chair of the Suffolk Safeguarding Adults Board, and Chris Robson, Independent Scrutineer of the Safeguarding Children's Board, both warn that the alternative proposal, to divide the county into three separate unitary authorities, poses significant risks for residents who rely on specialist support.

Under the One Suffolk model, all six existing councils would be replaced by a single authority responsible for both local and county-wide services. Government is currently consulting on two options for unitarisation in Suffolk as part of its wider reforms to local government.

County council reacts to new appointment at Sizewell C

Sizewell C today announced that Julia Pyke would be stepping down as joint Managing Director and that Nigel Cann will be taking on the role of CEO from 1 January 2026.

“Julia was a visible and public face for the scheme, always willing to attend community forums and events. It’s important that the new CEO is equally visible.”

Councillor Richard Rout, Suffolk County Council’s Cabinet Member for Devolution, Local Government Reorganisation and NSIPs

Suffolk County Council officers and councillors had a good relationship with Julia Pyke, who was well-respected – particularly for her work with local communities.

Suffolk, with the approval of Sizewell C now given, will be home to the UK’s foremost operational nuclear cluster.

The county council will leverage the opportunity for economic growth, maximising the opportunity for Suffolk’s supply chain and workforce in the operation and maintenance of nuclear facilities across the UK. This ambition was championed by Julia Pyke and the county council expects to continue to work with EDF to achieve this.

Furthermore, the council will continue to ensure that the surrounding communities, bearing the disruption of a twelve-year construction period, will receive the full package of agreed mitigation measures specified in the consent, by SZC Ltd.

67 new Skills Bootcamps launched in Suffolk and Norfolk

People and businesses across Suffolk and Norfolk now have access to 67 new training programmes, designed to help address regional skill gaps and support career development in key industries.

The programmes – known as Skills Bootcamps – are short, flexible courses that teach practical skills employers are looking for.

Training is available in a wide range of areas, including transport, clean energy, health and social care, construction, agriculture, the visitor economy, digital technology and manufacturing.

Courses range from bus driving and aviation skills to heat pump installation and AI literacy, reflecting the variety of roles local employers need to fill.

The bootcamps are open to anyone aged 19 and over looking to change careers or improve their skills, as well as to employers who want to train their staff.

The programmes are delivered jointly by Suffolk County Council and Norfolk County Council, working with a range of providers, and are funded by the Department for Education through the government’s Skills for Life initiative.

For more information on Skills Bootcamps, including available courses and how to apply, visit: <https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/business/supporting-employers-training-your-workforce/skills-bootcamps>

Firefighter applications surge as Suffolk boosts female representation

Applications to join Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) have surged by 32% compared to last year, highlighting a growing interest in a career that makes a real difference to local communities.

This year's recruitment drive also saw a significant increase in female representation among successful candidates, with women making up 17.2% of the recruitment pool compared to 11.7% last year, which represents a 38% rise. This marks an important step toward building a workforce that truly reflects the communities it protects.

The campaign drew applications from across England, and even attracted one candidate from Wales, highlighting the strong appeal of a career in the fire and rescue service, and the commitment of those willing to travel to pursue their chosen profession.

This year, 389 people applied, up from 280 in 2024, demonstrating that more individuals than ever are motivated by a career in public service.

To ensure fairness and consistency, SFRS hosted a series of mandatory taster sessions to launch the campaign, giving candidates the best possible introduction to the role of a firefighter.

These sessions provided an opportunity to meet crews, tour stations, and receive guidance on preparing for each stage of the process. PPE measurements were also taken to ensure readiness for later assessments.

Due to high demand, an additional taster session was hosted, alongside a virtual option for On Call firefighters, Wholetime transfers, and those unable to attend in person.

Recruitment outcomes at a glance:

- Applications up 32% from 2024 (389 vs 280).
- Female representation in the recruitment pool has increased from 11.7% to 17.2% – a 38% rise.
- 345 candidates progressed to the first stage of assessment.
- 203 advanced to the second stage and were assessed against the National Fire Chiefs Council Leadership Framework and the Code of Ethics - 116 passed.
- 88 were members of the public; 28 were existing on call firefighters.
- Following firefighter-specific aptitude and fitness tests, 100 candidates were then interviewed at SFRS Headquarters at Endeavour House, Ipswich.

It is anticipated that 64 candidates will be added to the Service's recruitment pool, ensuring there have suitable applicants available when firefighter positions arise.

This represents a 100% increase on last year's pool of 32.

The first cohort of successful candidates is expected to begin training in February.

For information about future recruitment opportunities, visit [Current Vacancies - SFRS](#).

[LionLink consultation to launch in the new year, communities encouraged to take part](#)

A written consultation and materials will launch on 13 January 2026, supported by five public information exhibitions in Saxmundham, Southwold, Hinton, Westleton and Yoxford. The consultation will close on 10 March 2026.

It is imperative that local communities engage with the upcoming LionLink consultation... I completely understand that some communities are exhausted – on a constantly moving conveyor belt of responding to consultation after consultation, for project after project.

The planning of the LionLink project is now reaching its final stages, before an expected application for a Development Consent Order later in 2026.

Therefore, the county council is urging concerned residents, businesses, organisations and town and parish councils to get up-to-speed with the scheme's plans, so they are in a position to contribute to the forthcoming consultation.

Initial details about the consultation are available on [National Grid's LionLink website](#), with further information being published in the new year.

Andrew Reid
County Councillor – Wilford Division
Tel: 07545 423799
Email: - Andrew.reid@suffolk.gov.uk