

Cllr Matthew Hicks 2026 Annual Report for the Thredling Division

Council budget protects frontline services amid rising costs and demand

Demand pressures, particularly in adult and children's social care, are expected to add £32.2 million to the council's costs next year. As a result, around 77 pence of every £1 the council spends will go directly towards services for people, including public health. The remaining 23 pence in every £1 will fund all other services, such as fire and rescue, highways and waste management, alongside the staff, infrastructure and technology that support service delivery across the council. To deliver a balanced budget, councillors approved £46.5 million of savings. These will be achieved through service improvements, more efficient ways of working, and a reduction in employer pension contributions, made possible by the strong performance of the council's pension fund. This reduction in employer contributions will not reduce employees' pension benefits. Councillors also agreed a 4.99% increase in the county council's share of Council Tax, comprising a 2.99% general increase for county-wide services and a further 2% Adult Social Care Precept to help meet rising care costs. For households, this means weekly Council Tax bills will increase by £1.23 to £25.90 for a Band B property – the most common in Suffolk – and by £1.58 to £33.30 for a Band D property. Alongside day-to-day spending, councillors approved a revised three-year capital programme, reduced from four years to reflect local government reorganisation planned for 2028. The programme will continue to fund essential projects such as school expansions and infrastructure improvements, while also investing in improvements to bus services, public rights of way, and cycling and walking infrastructure. This has been one of the toughest budgets this council has ever had to set. Government funding has gone up only slightly, and, because that increase is below inflation, in real terms we are receiving less. That puts even more pressure on our ability to protect essential services. We have made the reluctant decision to increase Council Tax. We know residents are facing their own pressures, but the government's finance settlement assume councils will raise Council Tax to the maximum. If we don't, we risk losing vital grant funding, and that would force even harder decisions. Even with those challenges, we have set a responsible and realistic budget that protects key services and continues to invest in Suffolk's future. But it also underlines a wider truth: council finances remain under real strain, and many of the long-term solutions – including long-overdue SEND reform – can only come from central government. The meeting can be watched back on [the council's YouTube channel](#). The budget papers can be viewed at committeeminutes.suffolk.gov.uk.

Council remains opposed to pylon project, as application submitted

Primarily, the county council maintains that offshore and undergrounding solutions should be priorities for the scheme, not 114 miles of pylons cutting through countryside, sensitive landscapes and communities in Norfolk, Suffolk, and Essex. Previously, SCC has formally and strongly requested that National Grid pauses the Norwich to Tilbury proposals, to allow for effective consideration of offshore alternatives. The application for the Development Consent Order - essentially planning permission - was submitted to the Planning Inspectorate (PINS) by National Grid on Friday 29 August. PINS has 28 days to determine whether or not to accept the application. Should it be accepted, full details of the project will then be published, with the six-month Examination period likely to begin in early 2026. If consent was then granted, construction could begin in 2027. In its current guise, the Norwich to Tilbury pylon project is not suitable. The less damaging alternatives, such as offshore transmission or high voltage direct current undergrounding, have never been fully considered. Such a significant and impactful project should not be determined simply for being the cheapest and fastest solution. The Hiorns Report concluded that proposals were premature and would not be needed until the mid-2030s. We have highlighted the need for numerous local mitigations, issues around airfields, construction traffic, public rights of way, removal of existing pylon lines, the list goes on. Suffolk County Council's response to previous consultations for the Norwich to Tilbury project can be found at suffolk.gov.uk

Suffolk County Council confirms decision to bring Library Services back In-House

Suffolk County Council has brought back under its care all 45 libraries. This 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. 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. This was an incredibly difficult, but important decision for the future of our Library Service. Libraries are more than just places to borrow books—they are community spaces where people can access vital services, learn new skills, and build connections

Suffolk's once-in-a-generation, state-of-the-art fire control room goes live

Delivered in just 18 months, the initiative involved building a brand-new contact centre from the ground up, recruiting and training an entirely new team, and implementing bespoke configurations tailored to all the communities in Suffolk. The new control room, powered by cutting-edge technology from Motorola Solutions, now serves as a future-ready, cloud-enabled hub for managing critical 999 emergency calls across the county. The decision to invest in a new control room for the county was made in 2023, following recognition that the previous system was no longer fit for purpose. The legacy system's increasing fragility meant the fire service could no longer depend on or guarantee the resilience that Suffolk's communities deserve. The new control room includes several helpful new features that will support Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service in responding to emergencies more effectively:

- Better preparation for major incidents – The system helps the team respond more quickly and manage operations more smoothly during large-scale emergencies, like floods and wildfires, which are becoming increasingly common in the UK.
- Remote access – Staff can now securely log in to the control system from any location, making it easier to set up mobile command centres or offer support remotely when needed.
- Improved call and data handling – A new system stores and organises control room voice recordings more securely, keeping all key information in one place and linking it to the right incidents.
- Stronger regional teamwork – The control room is part of a wider hub with Hertfordshire and Norfolk fire services, allowing the teams to support each other and share the load during busy periods, such as when multiple 999 calls are received simultaneously.

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