

Suffolk County Council Newsletter

March 2020



Visit [suffolk.gov.uk/coronavirus](https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/coronavirus) for health information, schools guidance, business advice and service changes that might affect you.

Keep up to date on the Government's response here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/topical-events/coronavirus-covid-19-uk-government-response>

COVID-19 related news

HOME, BUT NOT ALONE



A new Suffolk-focused community service was set up on 24 March to support people who need help during the COVID-19 pandemic. Called '**Home, But Not Alone**', the service has been launched to help connect people who want to volunteer in their communities with neighbours who are most in need. The service will mean willing volunteers, charities, town and parish councils, community and religious groups can all log their details and offers of support on an app, while people who need help can phone to request support. As the number of offers and requests grows, they will be matched so that the right help can be given where it's most needed. This support could include delivering groceries, medication or essential household goods, in line

with Government social distancing guidelines. Download the free **app**, called **Tribe Volunteer** from the **[Apple App Store](#)** and **[Google Play Store](#)**. The telephone number for those in genuine need of help is freephone **0800 876 6926** and will be staffed from **9am to 5pm**, seven days a week. The telephone line is not a general information line for COVID-19 queries, but those in need can seek information on support with care needs, loneliness, and connecting with community support. This is a new service and will adapted to demand over the coming weeks. People are still being urged to check **[GOV.UK](#)** for the latest guidance on a wide range of issues and changes caused by the COVID-19 outbreak.

Suffolk Highways COVID-19 statement - 26 March 2020

This is a statement from Councillor Andrew Reid, Suffolk County Council Cabinet Member for Highways, Transport and Rural Affairs

Keeping Suffolk's highway network safe and moving is our top priority at this most challenging time.

Suffolk County Council and our contractor, Kier, are working together with our suppliers and sub-contractors as one team to ensure Suffolk's roads can continue to be maintained and accessible; whilst keeping our workforce and members of the public safe from the threat of COVID-19.

Our service is critical to ensuring safe travel for our emergency and health services, and for those carrying out essential tasks. I want to reassure residents that we, as a highways authority, are taking the Government's advice very seriously and working hard to continue delivering our services for you.

To enable us to do this effectively, we must keep our colleagues safe and healthy by ensuring they follow the two-metre social distancing rule, clean down equipment more frequently, and regularly clean hands. These are amongst a range of precautions we are following for the benefit of our staff and the travelling public.

Unfortunately, we have had incidents where our colleagues have had people approach them and not keep a safe two-metre distance. I must ask, that if you spot any of our teams inspecting, or working out on the highway, for your safety and theirs please keep your distance to allow them to do their work safely.

Thank you to the dedicated teams of people who are working around the clock to keep this county moving. What you are doing in these unprecedented times is remarkable. I also thank residents for your patience, it is very much appreciated.

£60,000 for foodbanks across Suffolk

On 25 March, it was announced that food banks across Suffolk will be given a share of £60,000 to keep their supplies well stocked during the Coronavirus pandemic.

This money has been donated by Suffolk County Council and will allow the food banks to restock directly with supermarkets and wholesalers.

Paul West, Suffolk County Council Cabinet member for Communities, said:

“It is now more important than ever to look after those most in need in our neighbourhoods.

“This donation is one small part of the extremely valuable work that is being done in our communities with our partners across Suffolk.”

Public transport to operate on a reduced scale throughout the county because of the coronavirus pandemic

From 24 March, new timetables are in place for most public transport services, including buses, trains and community transport until further notice.

The changes reflect the fact that less people are using services as they stay at home as part of the new instructions from the Prime Minister on Covid-19. There is also a reduced availability of staff as more have to self-isolate.

Councillor Andrew Reid, Suffolk County Council’s Cabinet Member responsible for Highways, Transport and Rural Affairs, said:

“Working in partnership with transport providers, we are doing all that we can to help keep vital services going for those people who must travel - our key workers and elderly and vulnerable residents.

“The changes to timetables aim to balance the reduced levels of passenger usage as people follow the new instructions to stay at home with the need to reduce the number of people required to run transport services.

“These changes will also help ensure there are enough members of staff to keep vital services running over the coming weeks and months. We will continue to monitor the situation with our partners.”

Suffolk County Council is advising those who must use public transport to check with their local provider to find out the latest timetable. Further details can be found at www.suffolkonboard.com or by calling **0345 606 6171**.

All Suffolk recycling centres close until further notice due to coronavirus

On 23 March, Suffolk recycling centres closed until further notice.

The safety of customers and staff is very important. Therefore, in accordance with current government coronavirus guidelines of avoiding non-essential contact and preventing a risk of infection to others, the sites will close. It is essential that we do all we can to slow down the spread of the virus.

Much of the waste that goes through the Recycling Centres is bulky waste (large items such as furniture, wood and metals) and garden waste. People should hold onto these items until the sites reopen. Do not put any electrical items in any of your bins at home.

Where possible people should compost grass cuttings and hedge trimmings and if you can’t do that, keep your garden waste until the sites reopen. You can find more information on [**how to compost at home**](#).

Please do not leave any waste outside the Recycling Centres – staff should concentrate on delivering waste services. Leaving waste outside the centres is classed as fly tipping and is a criminal offence for which people will be prosecuted.

FCC Environment staff, who operate the Recycling Centres on behalf of Suffolk County Council, may be redeployed to assist other areas of waste services across Suffolk if needed during the COVID-19 pandemic.

For further information you can visit the [Suffolk Recycling website](#).

Joint statement on COVID-19 from Suffolk County Council's political group leaders – 22 March 2020

This is a joint statement made by Cllr Matthew Hicks, Leader of Suffolk County Council, Cllr Sarah Adams, Leader of the Labour Group and Cllr Penny Otton, Leader of the Liberal Democrat, Green and Independent Group.

Today we cast aside our political differences and unite around the work needed to protect Suffolk from the coronavirus pandemic that is threatening our families, communities, health and social care services, businesses and way of life.

There can be no doubt, the impact of COVID-19 will be felt in all areas of Suffolk, from our urban neighbourhoods to our rural hamlets. It will be felt by our toddlers and children, some of whom will miss their schools, playgroups and nurseries. It will push to the limit our businesses, who may struggle to maintain daily operations or have had to close. It will be very real for our elderly and vulnerable residents, for whom self-isolation and social distancing will be necessities, but also a significant worry.

It will change lives. It will demand that each one of us lives very differently for a relatively short while if we are to stand any chance of beating this virus. This means we must all be selfless and do the right thing for society, even if it negatively impacts on us. We must all follow official advice, not leave it to others. We must think about others, not ourselves. This calls for decisive action, from all walks of life. We are already seeing Suffolk communities come together with kindness and innovation to support each other.

We recognise that people are worried and anxious about what may happen in the future – we feel the same. Many of us have parents who we want to protect, or children, whose own fears we try to address with honesty and empathy. It is an unprecedented and extraordinary time.

As elected county councillors, we see first-hand the efforts being made by our own dedicated and brilliant staff and those working in district and borough councils, police, the voluntary and business sector, and the NHS, to ensure that we continue to deliver vital services. We are all working hard together, making sure that our most vulnerable residents, young or old, are given the help they need when they need it.

Our response is defined by kindness and resilience. Whether this response will take weeks or months, we are driven by compassion, determination and versatility to do the very best for the people of Suffolk.

Suffolk County Council is at the forefront of the fight against COVID-19. This is a major incident that requires the very best joint working. For our part however, today we are setting out our core actions for the people of Suffolk, many of which we have already done. We are working in a rapidly changing situation and these actions will be continuously reviewed and updated, reflecting Government advice.

- Protect our most vulnerable residents with easy access to advice, the right practical support and provision of essential public services.
- Provide more financial stability and certainty for care providers and support them to respond with maximum flexibility, including smooth transitions between hospitals and home care.
- Make changes so that elderly and disabled residents can use their concessionary bus passes for essential journeys earlier in the day.
- Work with our schools to implement the Government's school closure arrangements, including free school meals, support for vulnerable children and children of key workers.
- Communicate with everyone in Suffolk with timely, clear and relevant information in a wide range of ways.
- Redeploying Suffolk County Council staff into frontline social care roles
- Keep Suffolk's highways moving so that the emergency services can respond, and essential travel can continue.
- Ensure Suffolk Fire and Rescue has the resources to respond when lives are at risk.
- Work with district and borough councils and the Chamber of Commerce in Suffolk to support local businesses and the self-employed with advice and guidance.
- Start work now on plans to help Suffolk's communities and economy recover from COVID-19.

Our response to COVID-19 is the number one priority for Suffolk County Council. We face no greater challenge. Whilst we may not always be able to do as much as we want, we assure you that we are mobilising every resource and asset we have to protect and support our people and our county. Our great communities, businesses, schools and our public services and health colleagues are united in this fight to save lives, protect those most vulnerable and support our communities.

Thank you for the sacrifices you are making to help us to do what's right for Suffolk.

Suffolk Resilience Forum declares COVID-19 major incident in county

On 20 March, the evolving COVID-19 situation led to a major incident being declared in Suffolk.

Partners in the Suffolk Resilience Forum, including councils, health bodies and emergency services, have already been joining forces to respond to COVID-19, but the decision taken on Friday 20 March formalises joint-working and resource-sharing arrangements.

It means public organisations will work even closer than usual to tackle the challenges presented by COVID-19, including joint decision making, information-sharing, and on-the-ground support for Suffolk residents.

A major incident is called when the situation is believed to be beyond 'business-as-usual' operations and when there is the heightened risk of serious harm, damage, disruption or threat to human life or welfare.

Suffolk Police will now chair the Resilience Forum's Strategic Coordination Group, taking over from Suffolk County Council's public health team.

Stuart Keeble, Suffolk's Director of Public Health, said:

"Public bodies have well-established close working arrangements that prepare us for this kind of situation. This decision simply formalises those arrangements and makes sure we're making decisions together in a fully coordinated way.

"This is about making sure we use the resources and people available to us to tackle COVID-19 effectively. The best advice we can give people is to continue to follow all the official guidance to slow the spread of COVID-19, protect vulnerable people and protect the NHS."

Suffolk School Closures

Suffolk County Council is working with partners across the sector to coordinate a response to the government's announcement on Wednesday 18 March 2020 to close schools for the majority of pupils while remaining open for vulnerable children and those whose parents are key workers. [The current definition of a key worker can be found on GOV.UK.](#)

The government has advised that parents should keep their children at home and schools should remain open only for those children who absolutely need to attend.

Even if you are classed as a key worker, if you are in a position to keep your child at home then SCC would ask that you do so. This will enable schools to free up their resources and provides them with the opportunity to focus on the key children who need their help.

The fewer children making the journey to school, and the fewer children in educational settings, the lower the risk that the virus can spread and infect vulnerable individuals in wider society. Schools that are able to open should continue to follow Public Health England Advice with regards to cleanliness and infection control.

SCC have launched a helpline for parents which will assist them if their usual school is not open or has been unable to make alternate arrangements for pupils. If parents are classed as a key worker or have a child that is classed as vulnerable, they can call this line and SCC will liaise with schools to find them a place. The helpline number is: 01473 263985

You can [find more information on school closures](#) on suffolk.gov.uk.

There is also [guidance for parents on GOV.UK.](#)

Elderly and disabled residents can use their concessionary bus passes earlier during coronavirus outbreak

As of 19 March, Suffolk County Council is allowing concessionary travel for those with elderly and disabled bus passes before 9.30am, as the coronavirus epidemic continues.

The Council, working alongside its partners and bus companies, has revealed that it is extending its concessionary travel for those with elderly and disabled bus passes, as supermarkets make special arrangements for exclusive early morning shopping times for these people. This move has been introduced in response to panic buying in the shops which saw shelves emptied.

Previously, concessionary travel did not kick in until 9:30, after the morning rush-hour, but in response to coronavirus the local authority is allowing those who have the passes to travel earlier so they can get to the shops to buy food.

Changes to care services for customers

On 18 March it was announced that, in light of the current Covid-19 crisis, customers are likely to experience changes to the care they receive.

Customers will receive a phone call or a visit from their current care provider or Suffolk County Council's Home First team when their services are affected.

The county council's adult care team are closely monitoring the safety and wellbeing of all their service users and supporting their most vulnerable customers, who remain a priority.

Those currently receiving care and support will start to see a difference in their service in the coming weeks, or it may be that their care is provided by a different provider.

The council is working across the health and social care system to ensure the safety and wellbeing of everyone in Suffolk and will continue to keep customers updated of any changes as they arise.

Councillor Rebecca Hopfensperger, Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care, said:

"We understand that this is a very worrying and difficult time for many of our customers receiving care services.

"I want to reassure people that although they may start to see changes to their care, we are prioritising their safety, health and wellbeing. It may be that people are not be able to attend day care activities or that their care provider changes, but we will be doing what is necessary to keep them healthy, safe and well.

"I'd like to say thank you to everyone we are supporting and working with for their resilience and understanding during these unprecedented times.

Cancellation of Suffolk Walking Festival 2020

Due to the current COVID-19 pandemic, Suffolk County Council and its partners have made the difficult decision to cancel Suffolk's 13th Walking Festival.

The festival was due to launch at Clare County Park on Saturday 9 May, and was offering three-weeks of engaging and entertaining walks and events to get people out and about enjoying Suffolk's beautiful countryside.

Councillor Andrew Reid, Suffolk County Council's Cabinet Member for Highways, Transport and Rural Affairs, said:

"Due to the changing situation regarding COVID-19 and Central Government advice surrounding events, we have today sadly decided that we have no alternative but to cancel this year's Walking Festival. "Ensuring and protecting the wellness of our team and members of the public is of paramount importance.

If you have booked a place on a festival walk, the organisers of the Walking Festival will be in contact with you regarding your refund. For further formation visit www.suffolkwalkingfestival.co.uk.

Other News

Joint Statement on behalf of Suffolk County Council and East Suffolk Council in reaction to EDF Energy's decision to delay their Sizewell C application for a Development Consent Order – 26 March 2020

In a joint statement, Leader of Suffolk County Council, Cllr Matthew Hicks, and Leader of East Suffolk Council, Cllr Steve Gallant, said: "Both Suffolk County Council and East Suffolk Council absolutely agree that this is the right decision for EDF Energy to take at this moment in time. We believe there is no other choice for them to take during such a difficult time for us all as we focus on fighting the effect of Covid-19 across Suffolk.

"Given the critical need for our communities to have the ability to fully engage with the consultation and decision making process that forms a valuable part of the Government's formal Development Consent Order, we are relieved to hear EDF Energy has given due consideration to the timescales for making their submission and will delay for a number of weeks. We are now keen to understand what this means as we all currently expect to be living with the effects and restrictions surrounding Covid-19 for some time to come and we would not be happy to see anything done that restricts the community in taking an active part in the decision making process.

"We are keen to keep talking to EDF Energy about when it will be appropriate for all parties to see EDF Energy make their submission."

Suffolk County Council bids for better bus services

On 17 March, Suffolk County Council, as the Highways Authority, submitted a statement of intent to the Department of Transport for funds to improve some bus services.

The Department of Transport (DfT) has invited English local transport authorities outside of London to submit a bid for the 'Better Deal for Buses - Supported Bus Services' for a share of the £30 million fund to provide more frequent local bus services.

Suffolk has submitted a statement of intent for the full value of the county's allocated share of £580,715 from the DfT. The funding must be used to increase bus mileage and passengers within Suffolk. The funding is a one-off payment that needs to be used to deliver longer-term sustainable benefits.

The DfT plans to announce which statements of intent have been successful by the end of April. The county council will then carry out further work with local bus operators to finalise which routes would benefit from the funding. Implementation will then proceed with the view of services commencing late summer 2020.

Suffolk County Council is also working to identify further opportunities in the county to bid for funding from the Government's 'Better Deal for Buses' initiatives, with deadlines for expressions of interest to be provided by the end of April.

Funding of £220 million for local transport was announced in early September by the Prime Minister Boris Johnson alongside the promise of a new national bus strategy.

Suffolk wins funding for the next stage of A12 improvements

On 13 March, it was announced that Suffolk has secured £830,000 of funding from the Department for Transport, to develop an Outline Business Case to take forward its plans to improve the A12.

Announced during the Government's budget, Suffolk County Council has been successful in winning £830,000 of funding from the Department for Transport (DfT), to develop an Outline Business Case (OBC) to take forward its plans to improve the A12 East of Ipswich.

This project is specifically looking to increase capacity and improve overall traffic flow at junctions and will explore the potential for a new pedestrian and cycle bridge over the A12.

With the funding secure, Suffolk County Council's Transport Strategy Team will now begin work to develop the outline business case which, following public consultation, will be used to make a further bid to central government for funding to deliver the scheme.

It was also announced in the budget that the DfT have given their approval for Suffolk County Council to develop and submit a Strategic Outline Business Case (SOBC) for a project to dual the A12 between the Seckford and Dobbies roundabouts near Woodbridge. Whilst this does not include any funding at this stage, the SOBC will enable SCC to bid for future funding for this project too.

Speaking about the award of funding, Councillor Matthew Hicks, Leader of Suffolk County Council, said:

"I am delighted that once again Suffolk County Council has been successful in bidding for funding from central government for large infrastructure projects. These improvements are between the A14 Seven Hills junction and the A12/A1214 Park and Ride Roundabout and will help boost road capacity and traffic flow. I am also pleased that the scheme includes additional proposals to help encourage more walking and cycling.

"We have also been successful in gaining DfT approval to start development of a Strategic Outline Business Case to dual the A12 at Woodbridge between the Seckford Roundabout and the Dobbies Roundabout, and associated improvements at those junctions. This project is at a very early stage, but gaining DfT approval means we can begin moving forwards with this important scheme for all users of the A12.

"I would like to thank all our MPs who have worked so hard lobbying government to help us secure this funding and promote Suffolk at Westminster. This proves once again that by all working together, we can achieve more for Suffolk."

Planning for the OBC will start this year and likely be complete in 2021.

Parents can now opt-in for Suffolk County Council funded school travel for 2020/2021

The process to opt-in for Suffolk County Council funded school travel for the 2020/2021 school year has opened.

If parents have a child who is already receiving Suffolk County Council funded school travel, they must opt-in by the 31 May 2020 to continue to receive it.

Families of children starting secondary school in September 2020 will receive an e-mail if they are eligible for Suffolk County Council funded school travel.

If parents have a child starting primary school in September 2020, they should not opt-in until they receive the offer of a school place (15 April 2020). If they are eligible for Suffolk County Council funded school travel they will be contacted by 15 May.

Parents whose child is not eligible for SCC funded school travel but who wish to purchase a spare seat, may do so. The application for spare seats opens on 1 July 2020.

To opt-in or for more information on the Suffolk County Council school travel policy please visit www.suffolkonboard.com/schooltravel

97% of pupils receive a place at one of their preferred Secondary Schools on National Offer Day

97% of pupils have received a place at one of their Preferred Secondary Schools in Suffolk on National Offer Day.

This year, Suffolk County Council (SCC) received 8047 applications from parents indicating at which secondary school they would prefer their child to be educated from September 2020.

7355 pupils received offers for their first preference school and 7810 pupils received an offer for one of their three preferred schools.

Councillor Mary Evans, Cabinet Member for Children’s Services, Education and Skills, said:

“I am pleased that this year more families have once again received their first choice of school and that the vast majority of families have been offered a preferred school place.

“We use published criteria to decide who has priority for places so that the process is fair and clear. I appreciate that not all families will have received a place at their preferred school and where a parents’ preference for a Suffolk school is refused, we will automatically add their child’s name to the waiting list for that school. We will also send them information about how to lodge an appeal should they wish to do so.

“Starting secondary school is an important moment for any child, and the more we can do to make the transition to a new school smoother for them, the better.”

Councils urge Government to change approach to offshore windfarms

Suffolk County Council and East Suffolk Council are continuing to lobby the Government for improved coordination of offshore windfarm projects.

If there is no coordination of these projects, Suffolk’s natural environment and the people that work and live in the county are likely to suffer.

On 2 March 2020, councillors and officials met with the Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy (BEIS) to express their concerns. The meeting was followed up with a letter to the new Secretary of State for BEIS, Rt Hon Alok Sharma MP.

Council officials are asking the Government to:

- Co-ordinate a new approach to how offshore windfarms connect to the electricity grid, and make the policy changes needed to make this happen.
- Provide more effective and inclusive engagement with all parties for future energy projects.
- Provide guidance on benefits and compensation to local communities, and clarity on the economic benefits of energy projects.
- Continue their commitment to support communities directly affected by these large projects.

For their part, the councils will identify issues which may stand in the way of these projects and resolve them where possible. They will also make arrangements to involve the National Grid, Government and relevant parties in discussions.

Councillor Matthew Hicks, Leader of Suffolk County Council, said:

“I am concerned that our coastal communities and countryside will suffer irreversible damage if all these energy projects are considered separately, rather than together.”

“It is essential that the Government commits to a clear and coordinated approach for all the projects seeking electricity grid connections along our coastline. Suffolk County Council is fully prepared to work with the Government and all those involved to make this happen.

“We all share the vision of being net zero by 2050 and understand the long-term benefits that these projects can bring. However, we must do all we can to avoid them having a harmful impact on Suffolk’s residents and natural environment.”

This recent meeting with BEIS was held just days before the Government’s Planning Inspectorate confirmed the timetables for both ScottishPower Renewables EA1 North and EA2 windfarm projects. The Examinations for both these projects are due to begin on 24 March 2020 and last for up to six months.

Whilst the Planning Inspectorate’s Examining Authority will follow their usual process for these projects, it is interesting to note that they have sought clarification on the other similar energy projects, in particular, projects seeking grid connections in East Suffolk, as well as the Sizewell C Nuclear development.

Access for all at Suffolk rail stations

Following successful bids for funding, Needham Market and Bury St Edmunds rail stations will now receive improved access to platforms for its passengers.

A partnership of stakeholders including Greater Anglia Trains, Suffolk County Council, Mid Suffolk District Council and the Needham Market Group has secured Access for All funding – a government funding programme for schemes to improve station access.

For Needham Market, the station will receive an upgrade to improve access to the Ipswich-bound platform 2.

At the Bury St Edmunds station, the funding will provide a new accessible entrance on the north side of the station, linking the new car park with the station concourse.

Plans for improvements to the Bury station have received support from Greater Anglia Trains, Suffolk County Council, West Suffolk Council, Bury St Edmunds Town Trust and other local organisations.

Following the funding announcement, all parties involved are now committed to making the initiatives happen as soon as possible.

Councillor Alexander Nicoll, Deputy Cabinet Member for Transport at Suffolk County Council, said:

“We are delighted to have secured this funding. Both schemes are essential in ensuring that everyone can access the train.

“This work will play an important role in supporting the planned growth for the towns, as well as enabling people to travel to them.

“With climate change being at the front of everyone’s agenda, it is vital that we provide the facilities that enable people to travel without using their car.”

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