February 2026 report for the Thredling Division from Cllr Matthew Hicks

Council sets out plans for 2026/27 budget

The £850 million plan aims to safeguard frontline services, support the most vulnerable, and invest in Suffolk's future – despite rising costs, growing demand and shortfalls in national funding.

Key themes of the draft budget include:
Savings and efficiencies: £46.5 million of savings through service transformation and efficiencies, including a temporary reduction in employer pension contributions, made possible by the strong position of the council's pension fund.
Rising financial pressures: Increasing demand, in particular for adult and children's social care, will add £32.2 million in costs, alongside continued pressures from the Dedicated Schools Grant deficit.
Reserves: A one-off use of reserves will bridge a £5.9 million funding gap, while keeping reserves above the minimum level needed to manage financial risks.
Capital investment: The capital programme has been shortened from four years to three ahead of local government reorganisation in 2028. It continues to fund essential projects like school expansions and infrastructure upgrades, as well as new schemes, such as improvements to bus services, public rights of way, and cycling and walking infrastructure.

Our priorities are clear: protect frontline services, invest where it will make the most impact, and make the decisions needed to keep Suffolk strong, resilient and ready for the future. To support these plans, the council has proposed a 4.99% rise in Council Tax, comprising a 2.99% general increase and an extra 2% for adult care. Alongside a forecast 1% rise in the taxbase, this would generate an additional £27.4 million.

For households, this would mean Band B property: £25.90 per week, an increase of £1.23 a week (Band B properties are the most common in Suffolk)

Residents expect high-quality services and care use of public money, and that is exactly what this budget delivers. Transformation and efficiency across the council will ensure every pound spent delivers value for money – for vulnerable people, for families and for our communities. Despite these challenging financial circumstances, our priorities are clear: protect frontline services, invest where it will make the most impact, and make the decisions needed to keep Suffolk strong, resilient and ready for the future.

Adam Buxton shines a light on the need for more Foster Carers in a new documentary

Over cups of tea, emptying the dishwasher, Top Trumps, a dog walk and a kick-about in the garden, Adam asks Gary and Catherine the kinds of questions people often have when first considering fostering.

Adam Buxton said: "I didn't really know very much about fostering before I spent time with Gary, Shannon and Catherine. We've got 3 children and a dog at home, and the thought of adding another child or more children into our family life blows my mind. What they do, for kids who haven't asked to be brought into care, amazes me. And Shannon's reflections as a young person who has helped her parents to foster were just incredible. I'm full of admiration and respect for them and their families."

Gary, a former logistics manager and now factory worker, his wife and two daughters have been fostering for Suffolk County Council for 12 years. They usually foster children in the short term and have also looked after a young girl with disabilities for a longer time. In response to Adam asking him

why they foster, Gary gets emotional and replies tearfully that they do it to give children a childhood.

Catherine, a library book scheme co-ordinator, her husband Sean and their two children have been fostering with Norfolk County Council for six years. They originally planned to foster on a short-term basis but have become long-term foster parents instead. Among Top Trumps and Minecraft sword repairs, Adam asks Catherine why they foster. She gestures around the lounge and replies that they're giving a child a chance.

Foster Carers like Gary, Catherine and their families give children somewhere they can belong; a safe place where they can grow, learn and as Gary says in the film, have the childhood they deserve. Here in Suffolk, we need more families to foster with us. We don't need perfect families; we need families who can provide children in our care with love, patience and a sense of belonging, we would love to hear from families who want to learn more about fostering with Suffolk County Council.

The 19-minute documentary can be viewed on the Foster East Youtube channel, below:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M6uiWmxiCRU&embeds_referring_euri=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.suffolk.gov.uk%2F&source_ve_path=OTY3MTQ

Research shows that children thrive best in family environments and more foster carers are urgently needed to make this a reality for the classroom of children who come into care in the east of England. To find out more about fostering, visit www.fosterandadopt.suffolk.gov.uk

Savings on the cards as council seeks to cut number of most senior staff

Following the decision by the council's chief executive to leave her post at the end of March 2026, councillors are being recommended to appoint two existing executive directors into new joint chief executive roles - charged with leading the council through the challenges of delivering local government reorganisations, devolution, maintaining essential public services and financial sustainability in the next two years. As their existing posts would not be recruited into, the number of the most senior staff would therefore reduce by one and save up to £92,000 a year. The proposal is subject to agreement by the council's Staff Appointments Committee, which will meet on 20 February. If they make an appointment, the decision then needs to be ratified by all councillors when they meet on 19 March 2026. Suffolk County Council is facing a critical time over the next two years, with local government reorganisation, devolution and its duties to provide quality services to the people of Suffolk all happening at the same time. That is why this proposal has been specifically designed to make the best use of the excellent experience and expertise we already have in the council, which can be implemented quickly and at a significantly reduced cost to the Suffolk taxpayer. I'd like to thank our chief executive once again for her hard work and dedication throughout the past eight years. Her expertise and love of Suffolk will be missed, but I am confident this proposal is absolutely right for the county council. The report highlights how the council's constitution requires it to have a designated head of paid service, charged with leading the council's employees as they deliver services to residents. Significant uncertainty in the local authority chief executive recruitment market has led to many county councils, including Leicestershire, Lancashire, Lincolnshire, Essex and Hampshire all making internal appointments in recent months, having advertised the roles externally. The proposal to recruit internally would save time, money on salaries and recruitment, and make use of existing, well-developed relationships with partner organisations and knowledge of Suffolk. Any appointments would be subject to councillor approval and the completion of a successful recruitment process.

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