

Parish Clerk & RFO Report December 2025

Notes to accompany the Agenda:

Agenda # 7ii: Budget & Finance Report

I've prepared a forecast to the year end (31st March 2026) and although some budget headings predict a likely shortfall, the overall balance shows an underspend overall.

The budget line for 'Clerk's Salary' predicts the biggest shortfall; this is due to the government's introduction of increased employer PAYE liabilities, announced at the time of setting the 2025/26 budget and precept but the actual increase incalculable to the Council.

Agenda # 7v: 2026/27 Budget & Precept

BDC has published the indicative tax base figures which means that to keep the precept at 0% movement we would need to demand less than for 2025/26, i.e. £39,799 rather than £40,440. Although the tax base figures are indicative they don't normally change to the actual figures, expected to be published at the beginning of January 2026.

How the tax base is calculated -

The calculation begins with the actual dwellings in each parish (by band). This is then adjusted for reductions (exemptions, disabled reductions, discounts, council tax support) and premiums (for empty properties and second homes) at that point in time. BDC then adds expected growth (i.e. for new dwellings expected to become live before or during the tax year) and deduct the projected decline in premiums (e.g. where the premium has acted as a deterrent and the empty property has come back into use). They apply a % reduction for anticipated non-payment at year end (1% currently) and add back the contributions in lieu for any exempt MOD properties. All figures are converted to the equivalent no. of band D properties.

Therefore, even if there has been no change to the actual dwellings within a Parish, the tax base could still change year on year if residents' circumstances have changed (e.g. an increase in single-person discounts), if properties have been re-banded, or if there are changes to legislation (e.g. a new discount or premium is introduced). Note, there are no such relevant legislation changes for 26/27; however, the 2nd home premium introduced in 25/26 appears to have had an impact and many areas have seen a reduction in such premiums since the beginning of the year (this is the case in Copdock and Washbrook). Any anticipated growth or decline will further change the tax base.

Agenda # 15: Consultation on proposals for local government review in Suffolk

The Consultation on the Local Government Review is now live and closes on 11 January 2026.

I've had a look at the Consultation; it's in the form of 'agree/disagree' questions on both the SCC proposal (one unitary council) and the proposal from Babergh DC, East Suffolk DC, Ipswich Borough, West Suffolk DC & Mid Suffolk DC for 3 unitary councils.

The Parish Council is invited to submit a response to both consultation proposals. I've drafted the questions to be considered for each consultation for ease of consideration for you, circulated prior to the meeting and appended to this report, Appendix 1.

Clerk's new mobile phone

The new mobile phone is up and running; the old mobile phone has been passed to Cllr S Downey (04.11.2025) for him to delete/clear any personal data from and to dispose of.

Can Cllr Downey confirm this has been done please?

SCC Local Government Review Proposal

I attended an online presentation from SCC who gave an update on their LRG proposal and submission, on 10th November 2025.

I've previously circulated my summary of the presentation to the Council; a copy is appended to this report (Appendix 2).

Parishioner request for 'Horse Rider' warning signs

The Parish Council received an email from the owners of Copdock Riding Centre, at the beginning of October 2025, with a request for "slow horse signs to be put at each end of Saxon Lane". I submitted the request to SCC on 8th October.

After much waiting and chasing, I was cc'd to an email from Helen Beresford, SCC Community Speed & Safety Technician sent to Copdock Riding Centre 19th November asking for further information – how often do riders use the road, how many riders usually go out at a time and the routes they take?

The original request to the Parish Council also asked for Saxon Lane to be added to the Quiet Lane scheme. Unfortunately this is no longer an option as the dedicated funding SCC had received for the initiative has been fully spent. I have advised the Riding School accordingly, along with an assurance that should the scheme re-open, or similar funding become available in the future, the Parish Council will look at all suitable roads within the parish to put forward for consideration at that time.

Insurance Cover

I've updated the Parish Council's insurance cover to include an increased valuation of the new bus shelter (from £3.8k to £20k).

Revised policy documents have been issued showing increased 'Municipal Infrastructure' cover (was £191.3k to £207.5K). This takes into account the additional sum assured of £16.2k for the new bus shelter (£20k less £3.8k).

There was no additional insurance premium due for the policy change.

Allotments

The water has now been turned off at the meter for the winter period.

Sue Frankis, Clerk to the Parish of Copdock & Washbrook

Appendix 1:

Consultation on proposals for local government review in Suffolk

CONSULTATION ON THE PROPOSAL FROM SUFFOLK COUNTY COUNCIL: CONSULTATION FOR ONE UNITARY COUNCIL (formed from Babergh DC, East Suffolk DC, Ipswich BC, Mid Suffolk DC & West Suffolk DC)

Questions to be considered:

1. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the proposal suggests a council that is based on sensible geographies and economic areas?
2. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the proposed council will be able to deliver the outcomes they describe in the proposal?
3. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the proposed council is the right size to be efficient, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks?
4. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the proposed council will deliver high quality, sustainable public services?
5. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the proposal has been informed by local views and will meet local needs?
6. To what extent do you agree or disagree that establishing the council in this proposal will support devolution arrangements, for example, the establishment of a strategic authority?
7. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the proposal enables stronger community engagement and gives the opportunity for neighbourhood empowerment?
8. If you would like to, explain the answers you have provided to qtns 1 to 7. You may also provide any other comments you have on this proposal.

CONSULTATION ON THE PROPOSAL FROM BABERGH DC, EAST SUFFOLK DC, IPSWICH BC, MID SUFFOLK DC AND WEST SUFFOLK DC FOR THREE UNITARY COUNCILS:

1. **WESTERN SUFFOLK** : West Suffolk DC (plus 21 parishes from Mid Suffolk DC), and Babergh DC (less 31 parishes).
2. **CENTRAL & EASTERN:** Mid Suffolk (less 29 parishes), and East Suffolk (less 25 parishes).
3. **IPSWICH & SOUTHER SUFFOLK:** Ipswich BC (plus 31 parishes from Babergh DC, 8 parishes from Mid Suffolk DC, and 25 parishes from East Suffolk DC).

Questions to be considered:

1. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the proposal suggests councils that are based on sensible geographies and economic areas?
2. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the proposed councils will be able to deliver the outcomes they describe in the proposal?
3. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the proposed councils are the right size to be efficient, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks?
4. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the proposed councils will deliver high quality, sustainable public services?
5. to what extent do you agree or disagree that the proposal has been informed by local views and will meet local needs?
6. To what extent do you agree or disagree that establishing the councils in this proposal will support devolution arrangements, for example, the establishment of a strategic authority?
7. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the proposal enables stronger community engagement and gives the opportunity for neighbourhood empowerment?
8. If you would like to, explain the answers you have provided to questions 1 to 7. You may also provide any other comments you have on this proposal?
9. This proposal is accompanied by a request that the Secretary of State considers boundary change. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the proposal sets out a strong public services and financial sustainability justification for boundary change?

Answer options to both consultations:

Strongly agree

Somewhat agree

Neither agree or disagree

Somewhat disagree

Strongly disagree

Don't know

**Appendix 2:
Suffolk County Council Update on Local Government Reorganisation (LGR)**

‘Teams’ presentation Monday, 10th November 2025, 7pm

Hosted by Cllr Matthew Hicks, Leader of SCC (MH) & Nicola Beach, Chief Executive of SCC (NB)

Suffolk County Council, as is, has submitted a business case to Government for a single unitary council, currently referred to as One Suffolk. SCC believes that one council for Suffolk will be better for delivering all county wide and local services. The LGR is an opportunity for a fresh start and an opportunity to fix those things that frustrate residents and communities about local services. One Suffolk’s outlook will be to be an enabler and to work together with towns and parishes to deliver better services.

The One Suffolk proposal has been submitted for a decision by the Government, and although the consultation period has ended, SCC are still keen to hear the views and concerns of everyone. The Government will launch a public consultation on the proposals submitted, expected to start at the end of November, with a final decision expected in Spring 2026.

No councils, (county, borough and district) will exist as they currently are.

Town and parish councils will become the 2nd tier of local government (currently the 3rd).

Slide 1:

You said...	We listened
<p>More influence in decision-making -Requests for more influence and transparency in planning decisions -local representatives to be involved more meaningfully</p>	<p>A formal agreement between One Suffolk and the town or parish council. New powers and funding for town and parish councils, in areas such as speed limits and planning applications, where they express a desire for such support and demonstrate the capability to deliver.</p>
<p>Public awareness and understanding -Need for clearer explanations, accessible formats, and inclusive engagement</p>	<p>Residents, businesses and stakeholders would have a single, clear point of contact and accountability for all local government services.</p>
<p>Service quality and frontline investment -Concerns reorganisation could lead to decline in service quality -Requests for joined-up working across services</p>	<p>£40m capital investment fund for market towns, allowing them to focus on local priorities. One Suffolk avoids risks involved when fragmenting the county, creating significant variation in resources, capacity and service delivery. A single clear point of contact and accountability for all local government services makes it simpler for residents.</p>

MH gave the example of how fragmented the current system is – a weed growing on the pavement needs removing (one council dept.), the weed is then swept into the gutter (a different council dept to clear the gutter), the gutter needs clearing/emptying (another council dept.) One Suffolk proposes to change this. SCC is aware that people see County Highways as a blocker rather than an enabler. The LGR provides an opportunity to change the Highways mindset to be an enabler and to deliver stronger relationships with the named contact.

Slide 2:

Potential services/assets for devolution

Assets	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cemeteries and church yards • Memorials • Crematoria • Community centres • Public toilets • Local parks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public spaces • Sports grounds • Swimming pools • Play areas • Leisure and arts centres • Roadside verges and other small open spaces
Services	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minor highways functions and public rights of way (e.g. speed limits, gritting) • Minor development control functions • Soft estate (e.g. grass cutting and weeds) • Fly tipping clearance • Street cleaning • Community transports • Community safety 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Footpath lighting • Community grants • Isolation/volunteering/befriending initiatives • Partnering in local tourism initiatives • Partnering in local climate change initiatives • Street naming • Licensing (e.g. event notices, street trading) • Neighbourhood watch

A list of potential assets and services that could be devolved to town and parish councils. It was stressed that devolvement will not be compulsory; local councils will have the option to choose if they wish to take on a service or asset. Where there is a cost to the town or parish council, funding would be available. NB suggested that a break clause would need to be included in any transfer agreement/service level agreement, being mindful that the members of a council deciding to take on a devolved asset or service will change and that new members may have differing views/aspirations.

Slide 3:

Bold new deal for Town and Parish Councils

You said...	We listened
<p>Local identity and representation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Concerns larger towns dominate decision-making -Emphasis on preserving Suffolk's local identity 	<p>Empowering local communities by giving additional powers and funding to town and parish councils as desired.</p> <p>Extra support through creation of 16 new area committees.</p> <p>A council with 140 councillors (representing 4,227 electors each) – comparable to other unitary authorities.</p>
<p>Engagement and transparency</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Desire for clear communication, named contacts, and accessible information. 	<p>Dedicated phone line and email address for clerks and councillors.</p> <p>Named contacts, locally-based staff.</p> <p>More face-to-face contact.</p>
<p>Simplification and efficiency of services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Support for streamlining services and reducing duplication -Risks of disaggregation 	<p>Simplest, most financially efficient model, saving £78.2 million over 5 years.</p> <p>No service disaggregation of critical services like social care and highways. Minimises disruption to service users.</p> <p>A highways service that says 'yes' more – acting swiftly, communicating clearly and delivering results.</p>

Slide 4:

Financial analysis of unitary options

	One unitary council (£m)	Two unitary councils (£m)	Three unitary councils (£m)
Total annual benefit	£39.7m	£21.1m	£14.3m
Annual disaggregation cost	£0m	-£13.5m	-£27.0m
Five-year impact of disaggregation	£0m	-£67.6m	-£135.2m
Net benefit after five years	£78.2m	-£48.0m	-£145.3m
Recurring net benefit after five years	£39.4m	£7.3m	-£13.1m

This is Suffolk specific data, independently verified.

Slide 5:

Cllr numbers in the One Suffolk proposal

An area of LGR that has resulted in debate is the number of cllrs proposed in each business case. In One Suffolk, this number is 140. Each cllr would represent 4,227 electors.

Suffolk currently has 308 elected cllrs, excluding town and parish cllrs, representing over 200 wards and divisions. 26 of these are 'twin hatters' representing similar communities within both county council divisions and district/borough wards.

- **Guidance is contextual, not prescriptive:** Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) defines council size but does not prescribe a fixed number of cllrs
- **No statutory maximum or minimum:** The Commission has discretion to determine council size
- **Local variation is expected:** Council size varies widely across England, reflecting unique council needs
- **Future needs over current arrangements:** proposals should consider future governance needs
- **Strategic rationale over benchmarking:** Justify council size based on strategic leadership, scrutiny, regulatory responsibilities, partnership management and community representation.

Slide 6:

The creation of new Area Committees

- Community Empowerment Bill includes a new duty on local authorities to make appropriate arrangements for effective governance of any neighbourhood area
- Area Committees will anchor decision-making locally, with dedicated support from council officers and tailored approaches to local ambitions
- Area Committees will see cllrs convene with local residents and stakeholders, such as local VCFSE organisations and businesses – and Town and Parish cllrs
- Area Committees are able to foster their own identities and evolve over time to best fit local circumstances

- Each Area Committee will work with a dedicated council officer(s), who will provide support, coordinate and connect activity in the area and ensure access to local data and intelligence.

Slide 7:



If a town or parish looks as though it'll be dissected, it won't be!

Slide 8:

Next Steps

- SCC expect government to launch a statutory consultation on the different options for a new unitary authority/authorities in November 2025. Please share your views as part of the consultation.
- Following the consultation period, there will be a Ministerial decision (spring 2026 – date TBC).
- Following this, a shadow authority will be set up, with elections taking place in 2027.
- Vesting day April 2028.

Slide 9:

A new town council for Ipswich

- A new Town Council for Ipswich, repairing and restoring local democracy following the loss of IBC area committees
- A revitalised and enhanced Ipswich Vision Board
- **One Suffolk** will ensure that the civic and ceremonial arrangements, including the historic mayoralty and civic status of Ipswich, are not only protected but enhanced
- Supporting a bid for City Status for Ipswich
- Our ambition is to make sure the benefits of Ipswich flow out to the rest of Suffolk.