

DISTRICT COUNCILLOR REPORT JULY 2026

Better Recycling

Oliver Faiers, Head of Waste, Recycling and Fleet at Mid Suffolk District Council has been sending out weekly newsletters to councils since the new regime was introduced. I am selecting points from his latest briefing, for week 3.

With the recent extreme heat there have been increased levels of sickness and absence, however, crew members have been starting early to try to mitigate weather factors. Food collections have been prioritized over other elements of the service and most have been taking place on the scheduled day. 162 tons of food waste was picked up across Babergh and Mid Suffolk – a 6% increase on the previous week.

If they haven't yet received their blue bin, Mid Suffolk residents are asked to place glass, plastics, metal and cartons into the green lidded bin along with paper and card.

Any residents who have not yet received their bin(s) should email recycling@baberghmidsuffolk.gov.uk giving their full address or call the council on 0300 1234 000 (option 4).

Any missed bins should be reported at end of day as usual; collection is still likely to be within our 5 days policy. This does not generally apply to food waste as this is a weekly collection. However, in the hot weather food waste collection has been prioritised.

You can report any missed food waste collection by ideally emailing the details and address to recycling@baberghmidsuffolk.gov.uk – or by calling 0300 1234 000 (option 4). We will aim to return and empty the food waste bin as soon as possible. Where this is not possible, the crew will be made aware, so they should then not miss the food waste bin again the following week

Innovative planning change to make windows in listed buildings more energy efficient

Many listed buildings suffer from poor energy performance due to factors such as poorly fitting windows and single glazing. Currently owners have to apply for Listed Building Consent in order to make upgrades. However, Babergh and Mid Suffolk Councils are now conducting a consultation on changes to this system for Grade II listed buildings after drawing up proposals last year.

The online survey runs until 16th July and can be found at www.midsuffolk.gov.uk/llbco

Beautiful walks and foodie gems

Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils have developed the “Grazing Walks” Guide, highlighting perfect places to enjoy a picturesque walk followed by a treat at a local pub, café or independent shop. With more than 20 locations highlighted, its aim is to encourage more people to explore the countryside, be active and support local businesses.

Details of each location, maps of the walks available and places to eat, are available on the Heart of Suffolk website – www.heartofsuffolk.co.uk/grazing-walks

Port One Warehouse

Mid Suffolk’s Planning Committee have approved the detailed designs for Unit 14 after outline permission was given in 2024. The latest decision covers what the building will look like, how big it will be and how it will sit on the site. It will be joined directly to the existing Unit 12 and the 1.12 hectare plot will also include parking and service areas. Suffolk County Council’s highways team has not objected as long as conditions such as providing showers to encourage staff to cycle are met.

Financial help with heating oil

Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils (BMSDC) have joined forces with local Citizens Advice Services to write to residents who heat their homes with oil and who may be having difficulty paying for it following sharp and ongoing increases in fuel prices. The Government have given more than £50 million in funding for low-income households who use oil to provide hot water and heat their homes and local support is available through the County Council's Crisis and Resilience Fund.

Over the past year the BMSDC team has contacted more than 650 households about benefits and support that they may have been missing out on, including financial support re heating oil. This work has generated almost £100,000 in additional income for local households.

Consultation on the Joint Local Plan

A Scoping Consultation on the BMSDC Joint Local Plan opened on 5th June and will run until 31st July. Residents, businesses, community groups and stakeholders are invited to comment. Mid Suffolk residents can access the consultation on

www.midsuffolk.gov.uk/w/joint-local-plan-scoping-consultation

At this stage decisions are not being made about specific development sites. The consultation is asking for views on the key issues facing the area.

New Planning guidance: letters to chief planning officers

On 4 June the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) issued a planning update newsletter to chief planning officers in local planning authorities in England:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6a21a4f4e13080622db38690/Chief_Planner_Newsletter_-_June_2026.pdf

The newsletter outlines details of the significant updates on plan-making and wider planning reforms. These include the introduction of new data standards regulations for local plans.

It also highlights updates on compulsory purchase, and forthcoming regulations from the Department for Transport (DfT) to enable cost recovery for certain services. There is an update on the expanding role of Active Travel England in plan-making, alongside new guidance and support being developed.

There is a Good Practice Guide on archaeology and solar farms from Historic England, and the transfer of neighbourhood planning toolkits onto GOV.UK.

Two new AI tools unveiled to modernise England's planning system

On 17 June the government announced that homeowners waiting for permission to extend their homes, convert lofts or make other improvements could see faster decisions with two new AI tools unveiled by the government to modernise England's planning system:

The first is a new AI prototype that aims to halve the time it takes to process householder planning applications. The prototype triages applications, summarises key information and provides planning officers with an initial assessment they can consider when making their decision. It has been created by the government together with Google DeepMind, Google Cloud, Faculty and local planning authorities.

The second tool, Extract, is now available to all councils in England from today. It uses AI to help planning officers convert decades-old planning documents and maps, sometimes with handwritten notes, into readily useable data.

If successful, the technology will be rolled out nationwide by 2027 – with every assessment reviewed and approved by a qualified planning officer before any decision is made.

Extract was developed by the government's expert applied AI team, the Incubator for AI (i.AI), working with MHCLG's Digital Planning programme.

Councils can find out more information about Extract on gov.uk, including a video demonstration.

<https://provide.planning.data.gov.uk/extract>

New Community Right to Buy Fund launched

On 16th June the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government announced that pubs, shops and other treasured high street shops will be saved from closure more easily thanks to £62 million of new government funding.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/pubs-shops-and-local-assets-protected-with-communities-in-charge>

This government's latest Pride in Place initiative, a new Community Right to Buy Fund, will hand people in deprived areas the money they need to step in and take over community assets at risk of closure otherwise.

There would be support for social housing tenants to come together and make housing managers accountable to the local community, avoiding profiteering. There would be an emphasis on starting small and empowering frontline staff in community power pilots through £15 million in government funding.

Regulator of Social Housing publishes latest survey and announces evaluation of the impact of consumer regulation

On 1st April 2024, the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) introduced revised consumer standards for social housing landlords designed to drive long-term improvements in the area. It also began a programme of landlord inspections.

Now it has launched an independent evaluation to look at how these reforms have impacted social housing tenants in England

The RSH has appointed an independent research consortium to carry out the evaluation comprising RAND Europe, Shared Intelligence and the Cambridge Centre for Housing and Planning Research. The researchers will be contacting a range of landlords, tenants, and other stakeholders to gather views as part of the evaluation.

The project will span over two years, with the final report expected to be published in 2028.

New rights for people with social housing complaints

The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) is reminding individuals that as of 1 May, more people than ever before have the right to raise concerns about how councils manage social housing – even if they are not a tenant themselves.

Previously, there was a gap in the system. If individuals were not renting a council property, they had no independent body they could turn to if they had a complaint about how social housing in their area was being managed. This left many people with no way to challenge decisions or raise concerns.

That has now changed. Under the Renters' Rights Act, LGSCO can now look into social housing management complaints from anyone, not just tenants.

If you are a tenant of a council property and want to complain about the council as the landlord, the Housing Ombudsman continues to handle those cases as before.

Funding to help councils bring long-term vacant high street properties back into use announced

On 2nd June the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government announced a new £20 million fund to support English councils to deliver High Streets Rental Auctions over the next two years.

These powers were introduced in 2024 to tackle high street vacancy. They give councils a practical tool to unlock long-term vacant properties and open them up to new tenants, including local businesses and community groups. They are designed to encourage constructive engagement between landlords and councils, which has already led to over 60 long term vacant properties being re-occupied without a rental auction being necessary.

The funding will help support councils to deliver the powers by providing grants for refurbishment of properties, as well as supporting councils with the cost of compiling vacancy registers.

MHCLG is working with a network of early adopter councils who are prioritising delivery of the powers and sharing best practice and would be happy to discuss with any other interested councils.

If you have any questions, please contact:

highstreetrentalauctions@communities.gov.uk

New safety measures introduced to protect children around banned dog breeds

On 9th June the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs announced that children will be better protected from dangerous dogs in the home under a new government measure to strengthen safeguards around banned breeds, including XL Bully types.

From 1 November 2026, owners must not leave a child under the age of 12 in close proximity to a banned breed dog in a domestic setting or other private settings place without adult supervision. This will be a condition of the Certificate of Exemption, which allows owners to legally keep a banned breed.

The new safeguard will reduce the risk of serious injury to children in domestic environments, while allowing exempted dogs to remain with families where appropriate supervision is in place.

As with other conditions of exemption, failure to comply with this requirement may result in enforcement action. This can include seizure of the dog and potential prosecution, in line with existing powers under the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991.

While this measure applies specifically to banned breed-type dogs, young children should be supervised around all breeds of dog.

Further guidance will be published ahead of implementation on 1 November.

Funding announced for simpler, fairer, more accessible farming schemes

On 11th June the government announced that farmers in England will soon be able to apply for the new Sustainable Farming Incentive (SF126), a simpler and fairer scheme designed to support family farms in England to manage their land in ways that improve nature, soil health, and the environment while producing food.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/290m-for-simpler-fairer-more-accessible-farming-schemes>

Developed with farmers and industry, SFI26 is backed by £240 million of government funding for new agreements. A new £100,000 annual agreement cap will help ensure funding reaches more farm businesses.

Applications are scheduled to open from 30 June for two groups: small farms and farms without an existing Environmental Land Management (ELM) revenue agreement. A second application window will open in September, giving all farmers and land managers the opportunity to apply.

Among the new offer are several actions that encourage the reduced use of synthetic fertilisers in favour of more sustainable and environmentally friendly options, cutting input costs and boosting resilience to global market shocks.

At least £50 million will also be available for new Countryside Stewardship Higher Tier (CSHT) agreements this year, supporting targeted environmental improvements where they will have the greatest impact.

Councils are encouraged to share this information as appropriate.

Rough sleeping no longer a crime as Vagrancy Act repealed

The government has today (29 June) repealed the Vagrancy Act ending nearly two centuries of legislation that has criminalised rough sleeping and begging.

Originally introduced in 1824, the Vagrancy Act has been found to punish people simply for not having a home. As a result, it has pushed vulnerable people away from support, increased the risk of fines or criminal records and made it harder for people to rebuild their lives.

Repealing the Act is a vital step in ending a system that has failed to address the causes of rough sleeping and in shifting the focus towards prevention, support and long-term solutions.

This sits at the heart of the National Plan to End Homelessness

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/a-national-plan-to-end-homelessness/a-national-plan-to-end-homelessness>

backed by £3.6 billion of government funding over the next three years, which aims to halve long-term rough sleeping and end the unlawful use of B&Bs for families by the end of this Parliament.

Following a week of record temperatures, the public are also being reminded of the StreetLink alert system

<https://thestreetlink.org.uk/>

to notify their local authority of anyone who is rough sleeping and in need of support.

Heatwave and cold-water shock comms toolkits and resources

Water Safety England and the National Water Safety Forum have produced toolkits and assets to help councils share key information with parents and carers on water safety, and to help prevent drowning cases.

Looking at this information three key messages came out for me:

If you intend to swim

- the water may be much colder than you think
- enter the water slowly

- “Float to live” – until the worst of the shock is over – lean back, extend arms/legs and float until breathing is controlled before attempting to swim.

Unfortunately it's not possible to access these toolkits by a simple click and the web addresses are very long. However, much of the same information is available on the NWSF Open Water Swimming Guidance website.

Public health update

Young people to be offered two-dose MenB vaccine

On 12 June the government announced that young people in England will get protection against meningococcal B disease (MenB) through a one-off vaccination programme launching ahead of the 2026 academic year.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/thousands-of-young-people-to-be-offered-two-dose-menb-vaccine>

Eligible students will be offered a two-dose vaccination before they start university, where close and prolonged contact in halls and at social events can increase the risk of contracting MenB disease. Two doses of the vaccine are essential for protection.

This one-off vaccination programme will help to protect those at highest immediate risk while the government monitors and assesses new evidence to determine whether there has been a change in the way MenB affects people and whether any further vaccine rollout response is required.

The one-off programme will make MenB vaccination available to people who complete year 13 of education in the summer of 2026 born between 1 September 2007 and 31 August 2008, as well as

people under 25-years old starting university or moving into some residential further education settings for the first time in autumn 2026.

Councils are encouraged to share this information with young people in their area.

Adrienne Marriott
Blakenham District Councillor
29th June, 2026