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Suffolk Fostering Christmas film highlights what it means to belong

With the need to recruit more foster carers as pressing as ever, audiences will be introduced to a moving new film that captures the essence of family, tradition, and hope.

The film's story follows a young boy as he joins his foster family in the annual tradition of selecting and decorating their Christmas tree.

Among the twinkling lights and handmade ornaments, he discovers family photographs from years past – something that leads him to reflect on his own journey and sense of belonging. Observing this, the foster carers' daughter offers him a heartfelt gift, an act of kindness that restores his hope and affirms the warmth of acceptance.

With its poignant narrative and festive backdrop, the film is a celebration of resilience, compassion, and the enduring spirit of the festive season.

“We believe every child deserves a place where they can truly belong – and it’s a responsibility we all share to make sure they’re given the very best start in life. By choosing to foster with your local council, you help keep Suffolk children close to the people, places, and communities they already call home. You can give a child a place to belong, to grow and to thrive.” Cllr Bobby Bennett, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People’s Services

Through initiatives that champion care, compassion, and opportunity, Suffolk County Council continues to work towards a future where every child feels valued and supported. This new film serves as a reminder that belonging is at the heart of hope – and through fostering, we can help make that hope a reality.

The filming location was provided by Rougham Estate, while Offset Films produced the film. **Simon Eddell, Estate Manager at Rougham Estate, said:** “It’s a small contribution, but one that we are delighted to be part of in order to raise awareness of a significant cause. We hope it helps many children.”

To find out more about fostering with Suffolk County Council, visit: www.fosterandadopt.suffolk.gov.uk

In a letter received this week following an October revisit, inspectors recognised early positive change across leadership, governance and organisational culture, supported by a comprehensive action plan developed with staff and representative bodies.

Inspectors also noted the significant investment and support from Suffolk County Council - totalling £1.6 million over two years, which has enabled new posts, development programmes and organisational reforms to be put in place.

While acknowledging that meaningful cultural improvement takes time, the inspectorate confirmed it is satisfied with the service's progress to date.

Jon Lacey, Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service's Chief Fire Officer, said:

"We welcome the inspectorate's recognition of the progress made so far, which reflects the hard work and commitment of our staff and leaders.

"We are building a positive, inclusive and values-led culture, and while we are encouraged by this feedback, we know we are only partway through our improvement journey.

"Our focus now is on continuing to embed change, strengthening leadership behaviours, and ensuring that improvements become sustainable and consistent across the organisation."

Since the inspection last year, Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service, has:

- Secured £1.6m investment from Suffolk County Council to support improvement.
- Recruited nine new posts, with eight further roles in progress.
- Developed a comprehensive 37-goal improvement plan addressing all recommendations.
- Introduced new governance boards and improved oversight of progress.
- Delivered leadership development, training and 360-degree feedback programmes.
- Increased staff engagement through surveys, feedback processes and enhanced internal communications.
- Commissioned external peer support and challenge to promote learning and transparency.

To read the letter from HMICFRS in full, please visit: [Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service: Cause of concern revisit letter - His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services](#).

Suffolk secures more than £26 million bus funding over three years

Millions of pounds of investment is to take place in Suffolk's bus network over three years following allocation of Government funding.

Services, ticketing, and infrastructure will all benefit under the package worth nearly £27 million between 2026 and 2029.

Suffolk County Council will receive a total of £26,813,760 under the Local Authority Bus Grant (LABG).

This funding will enable the continuation and expansion of new and improved services introduced over the past two years through LABG support and its predecessor, the Bus Services Improvement Grant (BSIP), many of which were shaped by community feedback.

Suffolk will receive:

- 2026/27 - £8,849,119
- 2027/28 - £8,937,920
- 2028/29 - £9,026,721

The funding is split into two areas.

Revenue investment will focus on:

- Maintaining and growing enhanced services based on local suggestions.
- Increasing publicity and travel information to help residents make informed choices.

Capital funding will deliver:

- Renewal and expansion of Real Time Passenger Information across Suffolk.
- Improved ticketing options and accessibility in partnership with bus operators.
- Investigations into bus priority measures to reduce journey times and encourage modal shift.
- Upgraded bus stops with new shelters, better footway links, and accessibility enhancements—many suggested by local communities.

Local authorities will have flexibility to use LABG funding to meet local needs—whether by reducing fares, introducing new routes, investing in zero-emission buses, or improving bus stops and stations.

Last July Suffolk County Council announced a £2.8m investment in new bus routes and improved services following announcement of LABG funding of £8 million for 2025-26.

As well as new routes, some services gained increased frequency and a Sunday schedule added.

Alongside the £2.8m revenue for delivering new or enhanced services, the county council also [previously announced £5.2m of capital funding from the DfT](#) for new and improved bus stops, bus stations, bus priority measures or vehicle upgrades.

For more details of public transport in Suffolk go to the [Suffolk On Board](#) website.

SEND data shows improvement, but impact not felt by everyone, committee hears

The progress of improvements to special educational needs and disabilities provision in Suffolk was discussed at Education Scrutiny Committee on Thursday <4 December>.

The committee, made up of councillors from all parties and non-elected independent members, such as parent governors, quizzed health and county council leaders on the progress, plans and challenges within SEND reform. The last time SEND was discussed at Education Scrutiny was June 2024.

Progress reported to the committee included:

- Significant improvement in the timeliness of Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs). By January, timeliness will be well above the national average of plans issued within 20 weeks. (Approximately 50% compared to 3.8% November 2023)

- Issuing more Education, Health and Care Plans than ever before. In November, 364 plans completed, compared to 186 November 2024. An increase of 65%.
- The timeliness of Annual Reviews has also improved, with 892 completed in November - compared to 775 last November

The committee also heard how the Department for Education continues to monitor and track improvement. The results of a recent stocktake visit by officers from the Department for Education is due shortly.

Despite positive evidence, officers were clear that improvement is not yet being felt by all families and reiterated that a robust, detailed and deliverable plan remains in place to keep driving reform at pace.

Acknowledgement was given that work to improve SEND is complex and costly, working across many sectors and against a backdrop of a broken national SEND system. Suffolk also faces rising demand with an increase of 22% more Education, Health and Care Plans over the year.

Discussions also included the caseloads of staff, appropriate training including staff visiting education settings and recent investment in staff recruitment.

Reform of SEND is being driven by the Local Area Inclusion Plan, which is delivered by the SEND Local Area Partnership made up of Suffolk County Council, the NHS Suffolk and North East Essex Integrated Care Board (ICB) and NHS Norfolk and Waveney ICB, and education settings. There are five priorities; belonging and inclusion, quality of Education, Health and Care Plans, access to provision, preparation for adulthood and engagement and communication.

The committee will now agree a set of recommendations. The papers are available to view [here](#).

Loft insulation scammers ordered to pay £48,891 after targeting vulnerable Suffolk residents

Riva Surveyors Ltd has been ordered to pay £48,891 in fines and compensation, while senior salesman Justin Brason received a suspended prison sentence for his part in the scam.

Riva Surveyors Ltd (previously known as Riba Surveyors Ltd) and Justin Brason, aged 45, of Brambling Close, Stowmarket, appeared separately at Ipswich Crown Court on 9 December 2025 for sentencing, following an investigation led by Suffolk County Council's Trading Standards team.

Between July 2019 and February 2020, the company cold-called or visited elderly homeowners across Suffolk, Essex, Cambridgeshire and Norfolk, claiming to offer free loft inspections.

Once inside the properties, "surveyors" falsely reported serious roof defects such as damp, mould or infestations, and urged householders to install spray foam insulation at vastly inflated prices. Victims were told the work was urgent and that their roofs were structurally unsound if left untreated.

In reality, the spray foam insulation sold was unnecessary and, in some cases, unsuitable for the properties, with an expert witness later confirming that the reported problems were exaggerated or entirely fabricated. The insulation could also reduce property value and make it harder to sell or remortgage.

Many victims were elderly and living alone. Out of 20 affected consumers, six went ahead with the work, suffering significant financial losses. Two victims later had to remove the insulation at additional cost so they could remortgage or sell their homes.

Riva Surveyors Ltd pleaded guilty to 21 counts of misleading actions under the Consumer Protection from Unfair Trading Regulations 2008. Brason pleaded guilty to eight counts under the same legislation. His later attempt to withdraw his guilty plea was rejected by the court in September 2025.

Sentencing is as follows:

Riva Surveyors Ltd:

- Fined £850 for each of 21 offences, a total of £17,850
- Ordered to pay £31,021 in compensation to affected consumers
- Combined total liability: £48,891, to be paid within 12 months
- No prosecution costs awarded due to the judge prioritising victim compensation

Justin Brason:

- 12 months' imprisonment, suspended for 18 months
- Sentenced as 12 months for each of his eight offences, to run consecutively, reflecting that the judge considered each offence to be equally serious
- Ordered to pay £1,500 compensation, to be paid at £75 per month from February 2026
- 10 rehabilitation activity days
- 200 hours of unpaid work

The judge noted that culpability and harm were high but accepted that there had been no further complaints since the investigation began. As the company is now largely dormant, securing compensation for consumers was described as "a good result."

Suffolk Trading Standards' investigation was supported by the National Trading Standards Tri Region Investigation Team (TRIT) due to the scale of the offending across multiple counties.

"If you or someone you know has been targeted by a scam like this, you should report it to the Citizens Advice consumer service helpline by calling 0808 223 1133."

Spray foam insulation is not always suitable for retrofitting in homes and homeowners are advised to seek independent advice before proceeding. Those wishing to find reputable traders can use schemes such as Suffolk Trusted Trader, Norfolk Trusted Trader, or the Essex Buy With Confidence scheme – all endorsed by their local Trading Standards department.

£12m Active Travel funding over four years announced for Suffolk

Suffolk County Council has been awarded more than £12 million over four years by Active Travel England to continue its work promoting sustainable travel.

Active Travel England (ATE) works with local authorities and other bodies to help them put in place infrastructure and facilities that make it easier for more people to walk, wheel and cycle, more often, on local journeys.

It has awarded Suffolk a total of £12,537,098 for the period 2026/27 to 2029/30 to invest in footpaths, infrastructure, and cycle lanes.

In Spring 2023 ATE awarded SCC £7.9 million to develop active travel schemes, followed later that year by £1.495m as part of the then-government's national walking and cycling Social Prescribing pilot.

A further £3.7 million active travel funding was awarded in February this year.

The money has been used in a variety of ways, including most recently new pedestrian crossings in Bridge Street and College Road by Ipswich Waterfront.

Improved cycle routes include from Ipswich Hospital to the Waterfront area, Nacton Road in Ipswich, Main Road in Martlesham, and within Woodbridge as part of the town's active travel project.

The latest ATE award for future funding to Suffolk is part of [a funding package for councils in England](#) totalling more than £626 million.

The announcement comes days after the Department for Transport announced it was awarding Suffolk nearly £27 million to run and enhance [bus services and infrastructure](#) between 2026 and 2029.

One Suffolk best for most vulnerable, say county's safeguarding leaders

Two of the county's most experienced practitioners in adults and children's safeguarding are publicly endorsing the proposal for a single unitary authority in Suffolk – saying it offers the strongest protection for vulnerable people across the county.

As the government consultation on Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) reaches its halfway point, two of Suffolk's most experienced safeguarding figures have given their backing to the One Suffolk plan.

Anthony Douglas, Independent Chair of the Suffolk Safeguarding Adults Board, and Chris Robson, Independent Scrutineer of the Safeguarding Children's Board, both warn that the alternative proposal, to divide the county into three separate unitary authorities, poses significant risks for residents who rely on specialist support.

Under the One Suffolk model, all six existing councils would be replaced by a single authority responsible for both local and county-wide services. Government is currently consulting on two options for unitarisation in Suffolk as part of its wider reforms to local government.

Anthony Douglas, Independent Chair of the Suffolk Safeguarding Adults Board, said:

“My responsibility is to keep people in Suffolk safe, and to make sure that the agencies that look after them are doing it properly – and to support them in doing difficult work.

“In terms of what would work best for safeguarding, it has to be the One Suffolk option in which all services are integrated across the county – which includes housing services and many other specialist services that people depend upon.

“For me, running safeguarding services, One Suffolk will be easier to organise, cheaper and more likely to benefit people who need specialist support at short notice than would be the case if families and professionals have to navigate their way through multiple authorities.”

He added that delays caused by navigating multiple authorities to find specialist help could create a “huge problem” for those in urgent need.

Chris Robson, Independent Scrutineer of the Safeguarding Children’s Board, said:

“My opinion – which is based purely on the facts and what I believe is best for vulnerable children – is that working with partners who can concentrate their efforts and join together in one area is more efficient than diluting resources and serving a greater number of geographical areas.

“Suffolk has an established, mature partnership which works tirelessly to safeguard children. We should be proud of what it has achieved and avoid any unnecessary disruption that disaggregation could bring.”

Independent financial analysis by Grant Thornton shows that One Suffolk is the only option that is financially sustainable. It would deliver savings of £78.2 million in the first five years, while a three-council model would cost £145.3 million more than the current two-tier system.

Anthony Douglas and Chris Robson join a growing coalition of community leaders across business, health, education, agriculture and tourism who have publicly supported the One Suffolk proposal.

Some of these figures have recorded videos on why they believe One Suffolk is the best option for our county.

Richard Rout, Cabinet Member for Devolution, Local Government Reform and NSIPs, said:

“When Anthony Douglas and Chris Robson speak, we should sit up and listen – they have vast experience of working with our county’s most vulnerable children and adults, and have their best interests at heart.

“It is clear that One Suffolk is the smartest, simplest and best option for Suffolk. The alternative three-council model would threaten vital services for vulnerable residents, leave council services at significant financial risk and create a postcode lottery for residents.

“Communities from across the county have already engaged with us to shape the One Suffolk proposal. Now it is time to have our say in the Government’s public consultation – I urge you all to take part.”

The One Suffolk business case is built on rigorous financial analysis of Suffolk-based data conducted by global advisory firm Grant Thornton, rather than using generic national modelling as used in the three-council model.

The Government’s statutory consultation on LGR in Suffolk will close on 11th January. Following this, Government Ministers will make a decision on which form of unitary authority to adopt in Suffolk – either one or three.

67 new Skills Bootcamps launched in Suffolk and Norfolk

People and businesses across Suffolk and Norfolk now have access to 67 new training programmes, designed to help address regional skill gaps and support career development in key industries.

The programmes – known as Skills Bootcamps – are short, flexible courses that teach practical skills employers are looking for.

Training is available in a wide range of areas, including transport, clean energy, health and social care, construction, agriculture, the visitor economy, digital technology and manufacturing.

Courses range from bus driving and aviation skills to heat pump installation and AI literacy, reflecting the variety of roles local employers need to fill.

The bootcamps are open to anyone aged 19 and over looking to change careers or improve their skills, as well as to employers who want to train their staff.

The programmes are delivered jointly by Suffolk County Council and Norfolk County Council, working with a range of providers, and are funded by the Department for Education through the government's Skills for Life initiative.

For more information on Skills Bootcamps, including available courses and how to apply, visit: <https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/business/supporting-employers-training-your-workforce/skills-bootcamps>

Firefighter applications surge as Suffolk boosts female representation

Applications to join Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) have surged by 32% compared to last year, highlighting a growing interest in a career that makes a real difference to local communities.

This year's recruitment drive also saw a significant increase in female representation among successful candidates, with women making up 17.2% of the recruitment pool compared to 11.7% last year, which represents a 38% rise. This marks an important step toward building a workforce that truly reflects the communities it protects.

The campaign drew applications from across England, and even attracted one candidate from Wales, highlighting the strong appeal of a career in the fire and rescue service, and the commitment of those willing to travel to pursue their chosen profession.

This year, 389 people applied, up from 280 in 2024, demonstrating that more individuals than ever are motivated by a career in public service.

To ensure fairness and consistency, SFRS hosted a series of mandatory taster sessions to launch the campaign, giving candidates the best possible introduction to the role of a firefighter.

These sessions provided an opportunity to meet crews, tour stations, and receive guidance on preparing for each stage of the process. PPE measurements were also taken to ensure readiness for later assessments.

Due to high demand, an additional taster session was hosted, alongside a virtual option for On Call firefighters, Wholetime transfers, and those unable to attend in person.

Recruitment outcomes at a glance:

- Applications up 32% from 2024 (389 vs 280).
- Female representation in the recruitment pool has increased from 11.7% to 17.2% – a 38% rise.
- 345 candidates progressed to the first stage of assessment.

- 203 advanced to the second stage and were assessed against the National Fire Chiefs Council Leadership Framework and the Code of Ethics - 116 passed.
- 88 were members of the public; 28 were existing on call firefighters.
- Following firefighter-specific aptitude and fitness tests, 100 candidates were then interviewed at SFRS Headquarters at Endeavour House, Ipswich.

It is anticipated that 64 candidates will be added to the Service's recruitment pool, ensuring there have suitable applicants available when firefighter positions arise.

This represents a 100% increase on last year's pool of 32.

The first cohort of successful candidates is expected to begin training in February.

For information about future recruitment opportunities, visit [Current Vacancies - SFRS](#).

Suffolk residents urged to apply quickly for free home energy upgrades

At the end of November 2025, Suffolk County Council secured £1.38 million from the government's Warm Homes Local Grant Fund.

Residents and landlords are urged to apply quickly, as the funding must be allocated by the end of March 2026.

The fund aims to provide free energy saving improvements to energy inefficient homes if residents are on a low income, receive certain benefits or live in a certain postcode area. This could be wall and loft insulation, solar panels or air source heat pumps.

To be eligible, Suffolk homes must:

- be privately owned (either by you or your landlord)
- have an Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) of D, E, F or G (you can find this out when you apply)

Household income must usually be £36,000 a year or less - but if you earn more than that, you might still be eligible if either:

- you live in a certain postcode area (certain areas of Beccles, Felixstowe, Ipswich, Lowestoft and Stowmarket)
- someone in your household is getting certain benefits
- you have a severe or long-term health condition, which is adversely affected by living in a cold home

Once these conditions have been approved, an assessment of your home will identify which measures are best suited to your property. These will then be installed by trusted contactors, for free.

To check your eligibility, or to find out more about how Warm Homes Suffolk could help you, visit www.warmhomessuffolk.org or call the team on 03456 037 686.

Statement on provisional local government finance settlement 2026 to 2027

Cllr Richard Smith MVO, Suffolk County Council's deputy leader and cabinet member for finance, economic development and skills, said:

“We are deeply disappointed by the government’s [provisional local government finance settlement](#). Our current understanding is that Suffolk County Council now faces a £6 million budget gap — £3.5 million worse than we had previously forecast.

“This is despite government assumptions that councils will raise Council Tax by the maximum amount every year, and the introduction of a so-called ‘fairer’ funding model. In reality, the government has shifted resources towards metropolitan areas at the expense of rural counties like ours, while injecting very little new money into the system.

“This settlement makes an already difficult financial position even more challenging. We will continue to press for a genuinely fair funding formula that properly reflects the needs and costs of delivering services in rural communities.”

Council secures £2.9 million from DfT Incentive Fund for 2025/26

Suffolk County Council has been awarded £2.9 million from the Department for Transport’s 2025/26 Incentive Fund for best practice in highways management.

The fund, introduced by the current government, rewards local authorities that demonstrate excellence in highway asset management and efficiency.

The award builds on the council’s strong track record of success in previous years, where it has consistently secured the maximum available funding under similar schemes.

Under the Incentive Fund scheme authorities must report:

- Highway maintenance spend over the past five years
- Road condition data, with trend analysis
- Pothole repair statistics for the last five years
- A 2025/26 resurfacing plan
- Show a balance of preventive against reactive maintenance
- Coordination with utilities to reduce disruption
- Climate resilience efforts
- Adoption of best practices and innovation

Suffolk County Council will spend a total of £47.3 million on highways maintenance in 2025-26.

The Suffolk Highways 2025/26 surface dressing programme treated a total of 90 sites covering over 90 miles of road.

Similarly, this year’s resurfacing programme will deliver works across 57 locations covering more than 11 miles.

So far, 22 of the 58 resurfacing sites have been delivered with the remainder coming by the end of the financial year.

Primary school application deadline approaches

Applications should be made for children born between 1 September 2021 and 31 August 2022 who are due to start primary school from September 2026.

An application for a full-time school place must be made even if a child is already attending a nursery class in an infant or primary school, a pre-school or a family hub next to a school site.

If you are planning to move house, or you think your circumstances may change before September, it is still essential to make an application on time using the child's current address. Further information to help parents and carers with this process is available at www.suffolk.gov.uk/admissions.

Applications should be made online as this will mean parents and carers will receive a confirmation of their application. They can then log onto the online service on the National Offer Day (Thursday 16 April 2026) to see their school place offer and they will also be sent an email to confirm this offer on the same day.

If a parent or carer is unable to apply online then they should complete a paper application (CAF1), however these cannot be acknowledged, so it is suggested parents and carers obtain proof of postage. For those who completed paper applications, offer letters will be sent out by second class post on the National Offer Day.

School Travel eligibility is based on a child attending their nearest suitable school that would have had a place available. This might not be the catchment area school. To find out more about SCC's school travel policy please visit www.suffolkonboard.com/schooltravel.

Applications can be made at www.suffolk.gov.uk/admissions, where further advice and guidance is also available. Alternatively, parents and carers can call 0345 600 0981 for a paper application (CAF1).

Last year, Suffolk County Council offered 96.3% of children a place at the primary school their parent or carer listed as their first preference when they applied on time. If parents and carers do not apply by the closing date, their application may not be dealt with until after places have been offered to those who applied on time.
