

West Suffolk District  
Councillor  
Report for  
Hargrave Parish Council  
AGM  
May 2026



**West Suffolk District Council. A round up of the previous year's key areas.**

**February 2025**

**Devolution**

The Government is proposing the creation of a single Unitary Council for Suffolk along with other Counties within the UK, other UK Unitary Councils were also created under the previous Government. This will radically alter local government by combining Borough, District and County Councils into a single Unitary Authority. Much detail has yet to emerge, although one key point is Suffolk may not have a large enough population to meet the criteria for Unitary, thus invoking joining with other Counties. The key to this proposal is greater efficiency and savings and combined services.

Fast forward to March 2026 and the Government has backtracked from the preferred minimum population per Unitary Council of 500,000 and agreed three Unitary Councils for Suffolk, with a total County wide population of 780,000, thus creating four smaller Unitary Councils to replace the five present Councils of West Suffolk, Mid Suffolk, Babergh, Ipswich and East Suffolk. The new three Unitary's will be West Suffolk, Mid and East Suffolk and Ipswich and South Suffolk. There is an enormous amount of work to be done to achieve the intended aims and benefits of a simpler Council structure, my concerns are breaking up Adult Social, Highways and the potential amalgamation of Suffolk and Norfolk Police. This is the biggest change in local government for 50 years and from my perspective the Jury is out on the proposed benefits becoming a reality. But to end this item on a happy note, in May 2027 (next year) the West Suffolk District Council elections will take place and I will be retiring and this Parish Council will be dealing with one West Suffolk Unitary Councillor instead of wondering which Councillor (District or County), should be brought to heel over what. Surly a blessing in disguise.

But prior to this we have the Suffolk County Council election on May 7<sup>th</sup>. I will be attending the election count on Friday May 8<sup>th</sup>.

**Moving on to items in the previous year.**

- The WSC instigated the £500,000 Brandon Commission published its findings. The Commission's brief was to establish potential areas for growth and development in an area that where it was badly needed. Sadly, I feel the published results reveal little that wasn't previously known.
- In a rare successful challenge to the WSC administration's budget proposal earlier this year, the Conservative opposition group tabled an amendment to include free parking at specified times and reduced the costs of pavement licenses, all with the intention of supporting town centre retailers.
- Homelessness, not unique to West Suffolk, is a high priority for WSC. The Council has invested considerable sums in property to avoid the use of costly Bed and Breakfasts. Research has shown that early intervention in helping the family unit stay as such brings longer term benefits for all.
- The government is proposing to axe the office of Police and Crime Commissioner.
- The new West Suffolk Council better recycling initiative starts June 2026. More details at <https://www.westsuffolk.gov.uk/bins/better-recycling/index.cfm?aud=resident>

- **Advanced Manufacturing and Engineering Centre (AME)**
- An initiative designed to support startup businesses, the AME Centre will deliver 17 flexible, self-contained workshop units, as well as shared meeting and conference spaces. By filling a critical market gap, this centre will boost economic resilience, enable sustainable development, close skills shortages, and maintain Suffolk's competitive edge in the advanced manufacturing sector.
- West Suffolk Council is backing business by cracking down on illegal trading Three shops in Newmarket found to be selling illegal tobacco and vapes despite warnings from police and trading standards, A joint operation between West Suffolk Council, Suffolk Trading Standards and Suffolk Police has seen closure orders served on the Orange Shop in Crown Walk, Newmarket Express in Wellington Street and High Street New Market Ltd in the High Street.

More detail can be found in my previous reports which are available on the Parish Council website

- **On May 12<sup>th</sup> West Suffolk council** has two meetings, the AGM and an extraordinary meeting of Council.
- **AGM agenda items:**
- Election of Chair of the Council for 2026 to 2027
- Election of Vice Chair of the Council for 2026 to 2027
- Having regard to the provisions of the Constitution, and if practicable, the Chair will invite the Leader of the Council to announce the composition and constitution of the Cabinet for the ensuing year, and the names of the councillors chosen to be members of the Cabinet.
- Review of political balance and appointment to committees 2026 to 2027
- Local Government Reorganisation - establishment of a (voluntary) joint committee
- Appointment of Chair and Vice Chair of scrutiny committees 2026 to 2027
- In accordance with the Constitution, the Council will appoint the
- Chair and Vice Chair of the:
  - a. Overview and Scrutiny Committee
  - b. Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee
- **Extraordinary meeting**
- Referral from Cabinet: 14 April 2026 - West Suffolk Local Plan Timetable, Notice to Commence and Scoping Consultation

*Mike Chester*

**West Suffolk**  
Council

District Councillor for the Chedburgh and Chevington Ward