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| **Budget Approval** | The budget received unanimous support across all parties at the Full Council meeting on 27th February. Our Capital ambition plan includes £2.1m for regeneration and £3.1m for sports provision with 29% being spent in Stowmarket, our biggest town, and 71% across more rural areas.  The innovative development at Gateway 14 together with income from development has enabled us to make these investments across the district while being able to take the decision to not raise your District council element of Council tax this year.  District Councillor Localities budgets have also been increased to £10,000 per Councillor for 2025/26 due to popular demand.  Full details of MSDCs revenue and expenditure alongside the medium term plan will sortly be available on our Council website under finance. (See also economic strategy)  [Finance - Mid Suffolk District Council - babergh.gov.uk / midsuffolk.gov.uk](https://www.midsuffolk.gov.uk/finance) |
| **Mid-Suffolk Magazine** | You will all have received a copy through the post, in which you can read more about the Gateway 14 story on page 6 and there’s a recycling guide on the back cover. |
| **Devolution**  **and**  **Local Government Reorganisation (LGR)** | Devolution refers to the election of a single Mayor for Norfolk and Suffolk and the creation of a new Mayoral Authority.  LGR refers to the creation of new unitary councils  Devolution and LGR has continued at pace with the County Council request to be part of the priority programme being granted and county elections in May 2025 now being postponed for up to 12 months. In terms of devolution, a Mayor for Norfolk and Suffolk will now be elected in May 2026 and the Mayoral Authority will then be created with devolved powers and extra funding from central government. With substantial strategic powers, this new authority will become a new tier of local government with a potential workforce of 300 employees and its own council tax precept. Under the devolution and LGR proposals, there will the Mayoral Authority, one or more unitary councils in Suffolk along with the existing town and parish councils. The district and borough councils will be abolished with their powers and duties absorbed within the new unitary councils. Draft proposals for LGR in Suffolk are required to be submitted by 21st March – a very tight deadline. Government would prefer to receive one set of proposals for Suffolk. However, it is likely to receive several. Suffolk County Council has already declared in favour of a single unitary council without yet producing an evidence base. Legally, it would be a brand-new entity but it might be seen by some as merely a rebranding of the county organisation whilst it absorbs all the functions currently carried out by the district and borough councils. Ipswich Borough Council has proposed a three unitary model for Suffolk. This would include a Greater Ipswich unitary council encompassing the Shotley peninsula, Felixstowe and all the land between, along with the many villages that surround Ipswich. This model would bring the Claydon & Barham ward, along with the likes of Bramford, Great Blakenham, Sproughton and Kesgrave into Greater Ipswich. Council tax equalisation could see large increases for these villages – Ipswich charge £419.58 for a Band D property in 2025/26 compared to, for example, Mid Suffolk’s £175.03. It is already known that the business case would include plans for a Northern Bypass with housing to meet the governments targets. The four other district councils have yet to finalise their proposals but a two-unitary solution which combines Babergh, Mid Suffolk and West Suffolk into one new unitary, and Ipswich and East Suffolk into another unitary has the merits of using existing district ‘building blocks’ to create two very similar sized unitary councils (in terms of population/voters/dwellings) whilst ‘more localising’ the present county council functions. The evidence base for how this will meet the government’s criteria is being prepared. Whether the government’s decision will be evidence based or political remains to be seen. The March draft submission(s) form just the start of this exercise with detailed working plans and wider public consultation to be undertaken over the next six months prior to final submission for government consideration in September. We will do our best to keep our parishes up-to-date with these fast-moving developments but please also watch the press and local social media for news.  Elections for the shadow Unitary authorities will likely be in 2027 and they should be up and running during 2028, at which point Suffolk County Council, the 4 District Councils and Ipswich Borough Council will cease to exist. |
| **New Independent Group** | Mid Suffolk District Council now has a new, Mid Suffolk Independents group of councillors. Four Conservative group members have split away from their previous group to form this new, independent group. This division arose after a fundamental disagreement with the Conservative county group’s approach to devolution and LGR. By going independent for the remainder of their term of office (until the district council is abolished) these newly independent councillors have disassociated themselves from the county decision to request the government to postpone the May elections, embrace the Labour government’s top-down mayoral devolution, local government reorganisation which includes the abolition of the well-run, cost effective and locally accountable Mid Suffolk District Council |
| **Planning application notification** | An 8 week public consultation is to be launched on whether to stop sending out letters to residents.  Local Planning Authorities are required to notify neighbours of planning applications submitted by either posting letters to neighbours whose boundary adjoins the application site or by placing a notice on site. B&MSDCs Councils currently go beyond this and use both methods. Digital contact is not part of the current statutory provision. |

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