



Cllr Karen Soons
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karen.soons@suffolk.gov.uk
07864 601 887



Visit [suffolk.gov.uk/coronavirus](https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/coronavirus) for health advice, service changes, business support and schools' guidance.

Keep up to date on the latest guidance on Covid-19 from central government here: www.gov.uk/coronavirus

As of Monday 4 January, Suffolk is in line with national Covid-19 Restrictions – Moving into a national lockdown. Testing capacity has increased in response to demand.

More than one third of Suffolk's total confirmed coronavirus cases were recorded in the last two weeks, government data has shown.

A total of 15,643 people have tested positive for the virus in the county as of January 2 – with 5,321 people testing positive from December 20 to January 2, making up 34% of all cases recorded in Suffolk by that point.

While the figures show cases are significantly on the rise, testing has vastly increased in recent months when compared to the first wave of the coronavirus pandemic. Mobile testing has increased countywide, while a walk-in test centre has also opened at Portman Road, Ipswich, alongside the permanent test centre at Copdock.

Matthew Hicks, Leader of the Suffolk County Council and Chair of Suffolk's Local Outbreak Engagement Board, said:

the steps taken by the public will be "critical" in the county's fight against the virus.

Stuart Keeble, Suffolk's Director of Public Health, said:

"Suffolk is seeing a similar, sharp increase in positive cases in line with the regional picture, which is making more people ill and putting our hospitals under even more pressure.

"The new variant of the virus spreads more easily, we must all limit contact with others wherever possible. Even though you may not have any symptoms, you may be giving Covid-19 to someone else without realising it.

"We all need to maintain social distancing, continue washing our hands regularly, wearing a mask when appropriate and strictly following the government's guidance."

Support payments available for those told to self-isolate on low incomes

As of the 24th December, more residents on low incomes or benefits can now get financial help if they are told to self-isolate due to COVID-19.

Previously Test and Trace Support payments could only be given to people meeting certain criteria, including on benefits. Now Councils across Suffolk have extended this, using their discretion, to help those on low incomes but not on benefits.

Councils across Suffolk are helping administer the Government grant scheme to help people remain at home and do their bit to reduce the spread of COVID-19.

Details about the Test and Trace Support Payments can be found on District and Borough Council websites and how to apply for it (**see below**). This is part of a range of measures that councils across Suffolk have introduced to support communities and businesses during the coronavirus pandemic.

Those who are eligible will need to meet all the following criteria:

- You have been told to self-isolate by NHS Test and Trace on or after 28 September 2020.
- You have responded to your notification from the NHS Test and Trace and engaged with the service by providing the legally required information.
- You are employed or self-employed.
- You cannot work from home and will lose income as a result.
- You are currently receiving at least one of the following benefits: Universal Credit, Working Tax Credit, income-based Employment and Support Allowance, income-based Jobseeker's Allowance, Income Support, Housing Benefit and/or Pension Credit, OR (under the new discretionary powers) you have a household income of less than £37,400 (couple or single parents) or £19,200 (single person) and have savings of less than £3,000.

- You made your application within 14 days of the last day of your NHS test and trace self-isolation period.

Applicants should ensure that they have the below information available before starting the application:

- NI number
- Your 8-digit test and trace ID number
- Your most recent bank statement, proof of self-employment or wage slips

Visit your District or Borough Council websites for details on how to apply for the £500 Test and Trace Support Payment:

- Babergh District Council: babergh.gov.uk/benefits/coronavirus-money-and-benefits-advice/
- Mid Suffolk District Councils midsuffolk.gov.uk/benefits/coronavirus-money-and-benefits-advice/
- East Suffolk Council <https://www.eastsuffolk.gov.uk/east-suffolk-test-and-trace-payment-scheme>
- Ipswich Borough Council <https://www.ipswich.gov.uk/content/self-isolation-support-payments>
- West Suffolk Council Test and Trace Support Payment westsuffolk.gov.uk

Additional help, including financial aid, is also available from Suffolk Support and Advice Service. This additional help is available for those facing financial difficulty or needing support – especially for those who have never asked for help before. On 1 October 2020, the Suffolk Support and Advice Service phoneline was launched to help people across the county access information or support relating to debt, benefits, housing or employment.

People can contact the Suffolk Support and Advice Service on 0800 068 3131 between 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday or go to: <https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/coronavirus-covid-19/suffolk-advice-and-support-service/>

Matthew Hicks, Leader of the Suffolk County Council and Chair of Suffolk’s Local Outbreak Engagement Board, said:

“This pandemic is sadly putting some Suffolk families and residents in financial difficulties. I know that some have never faced these pressures before, and have never needed to seek support or benefits.

“But I want them to know that there are services available to support them, and this new telephone number is the first call to make if you are worried about debt, benefits, housing or employment.

“Suffolk councils have been at the forefront of supporting our communities and businesses during the challenges of Covid-19. They are dedicated to carry on helping our communities stay safe and support our residents.”

Suffolk 2020 fund projects to deliver over £2.5 million in new community-focused initiatives across the county

On the 18th December, seven new projects were announced as part of the Suffolk 2020 fund to support residents and improve the county for years to come.

As part of the council's investment in Suffolk's communities and its ongoing commitment to protecting the environment, the authority launched a special one-off fund in March with the aim of setting up and delivering a range of initiatives and projects that provide a positive, tangible impact in what has proven to be an extremely challenging year.

The announced initiatives and projects are as followed:

New booking system and automatic number plate recognition at Household Waste Recycling Centres – Improving the efficiency and customer experience across all 11 recycling centres by enhancing the online booking system using automatic number plate recognition (ANPR) and automated entry barriers.

Adult Digital Learning - Developing new virtual learning tools and techniques and setting up a laptop loan scheme to strengthen and extend access to the Adult Learning Service for those living in digital and/or rural isolation. This approach will enable people to enhance their knowledge and skills to secure employment. Building on the swift switch to virtual learning during lockdown, we will further develop virtual learning for adults across Suffolk and use new technologies to enrich and improve the quality of interaction and training, modernising the service's offer.

Youth Work - Developing and supporting growth of grass roots organisations to deliver accessible, high quality provision for youths across Suffolk. Includes creation of a virtual 'Centre of Excellence' to share best practice and provide a 'one stop shop' of support for youth groups across Suffolk.

Discovering Suffolk – raising awareness of Suffolk's countryside and the county's rights of way network, promoting local (Covid-safe) outdoor activities across all of Suffolk with the development of a smartphone outdoor app and QR codes to engage new audiences.

Automated Numberplate Recognition Speed Indicators – Devices will be installed at the roadside to tackle localised problems with speeding drivers. The devices will be periodically moved between sites of concern and the data will be forwarded to the Police to assist with targeted enforcement.

Virtual Reality therapy - Engagement and coproduction with people living with dementia and their carers to explore and develop interactive and therapeutic experiences to support wellbeing. These would be delivered through mobile virtual reality headsets and include bespoke content and interactions based around archive media of Suffolk.

Mobile Community 'Care Hubs' - Digitally equip and staff selected community vehicles accessing rural communities within Suffolk. This will support digital inclusion

and provide a way to share information and provide help around the opportunities available with care technologies and other digital skills.

The work involved in setting up and enabling these projects will begin in early 2021, setting in motion a range of new community projects that will benefit people for years to come. The council's agreement to move forwards with these exciting projects listed above follows the successful launch of the first three Suffolk 2020 projects that were announced over recent months:

EV Vehicle Charging Points – Making grants available to install around 100 vehicle charging points throughout the county. Particularly targeting rural areas and sites owned and managed by not-for-profit organisations such as Parish Councils, village halls, sports clubs, libraries and charities.

Tree Planting - Increasing tree cover, through rural and urban planting schemes, planting approximately 100,000 trees over the next 18 months, establishing 'healing woodlands' to remember those lost to Covid-19, and increasing biodiversity along roadside verges.

Quiet Lanes - Encouraging the use of non-motorised vehicles and more considerate driving at lower speeds along a range of the community's self-selected rural lanes, with a view to adding 200 new lanes across Suffolk.

Matthew Hicks, Leader of the Suffolk County Council, said:

"Whilst 2020 will live long in the memory for many reasons, the launch of these projects as part of the Suffolk 2020 Fund offers some real optimism and effort to bring communities together, supporting projects that will provide social, environmental and economic benefits in years to come.

"The Suffolk 2020 Fund was only made possible because of the decision of this council to use part of the Government's one-year financial settlement to invest up to £3million throughout 2020 to kickstart some of the beneficial community projects that ordinarily may not have received as much focus or opportunity, given the other huge, costly frontline services that the county council is responsible for.

"I am very pleased that in amongst the great deal of work that is happening to fight the spread of Covid-19 across Suffolk this year, that we have been able to ensure we continue our work to invest in these timely and incredibly worthy projects to improve the local environment and communities for Suffolk's residents."

Proposed changes to Sizewell C application are step in right direction

On the 18th December, Suffolk County Council welcomed EDF Energy's movement towards reducing the number of additional heavy good vehicles on Suffolk's roads.

As part of its response to EDF Energy's latest community consultation on its application for Sizewell C, Suffolk County Council has welcomed the energy provider's movement towards reducing the number of additional heavy good vehicle

movements on Suffolk's roads and increasing the use of rail and marine freight deliveries during site construction.

The Council has urged EDF Energy for many years to maximise freight deliveries by sea and rail and significantly, being of the view that the transport proposals were not sustainable, so it welcomes the proposals for an additional Beach Landing Facility on Sizewell Beach to bring construction materials in by sea, as well as an additional night-time rail delivery of materials to site.

In its response, the Council also reflects that many of the proposals offered still lack vital elements in detail and assessment at this stage – such as impacts of the proposals on the coastline or night-time disturbance of residents living close to railway lines. The Council would welcome the opportunity for further dialogue with SZC Co. to better understand details of the current proposals, and the evidence base which has led to them.

Councillor Richard Rout, Cabinet Member for Environment and Public Protection at Suffolk County Council, said:

“It is encouraging to see that EDF Energy has begun listening to the concerns raised by us and Suffolk's communities.

“Recognising the need for further detail, the Council does welcome the principle of the changes proposed by EDF Energy, as they begin to address some of the concerns we have repeatedly raised. However, we feel there still remains work to be done if the scheme is to be acceptable to us and our communities - not least in the area of further eliminating, minimising, mitigating, or compensating for the impact of the scheme on Suffolk's unique natural environment.

“I believe it is essential that EDF Energy now fully pursues the development of these proposals to further improve aspects of their application and overall scheme. The Council will continue to work with EDF to aim to resolve any new issues raised, overcome challenges and find suitable mitigation measures to enable these changes.”

Green light for new pedestrian crossing near Laureate Community Academy

On the 17 December, the green light was given for a new pedestrian crossing to be installed near Laureate Community Academy.

The move comes after widespread support and campaigning for a safe crossing on Exning Road to the primary school. Exning Road is a main route to Newmarket's town centre and employment areas.

It is also hoped that the new crossing will encourage more parents and pupils to walk, cycle and scoot to school. Suffolk County Council's goal to be the greenest County relies on the success of such initiatives.

Suffolk County Councillor Andy Drummond for Newmarket and Red Lodge, said:

“The school desperately needs this crossing and I am delighted to have worked collaboratively with colleagues at Suffolk County Council and West Suffolk Council to deliver it.”

Rachel Hood, Suffolk County Councillor for Exning and Newmarket, said:

“This is a clear example of Suffolk and West Suffolk Councillors working together for the benefit of our residents with determined effectiveness to improve the safety of our children and parents.”

West Suffolk District Councillor Karen Soons for Newmarket North, said:

“I am thrilled to see this new pedestrian crossing approved. It will make Exning Road safer for children, parents/carers and staff. As a mother of 4 children, I know how hard it is to walk children safely to school on a very busy road.”

Help shape guidance for new housing developments in Suffolk

On the 17th December, Suffolk County Council launched the Suffolk Design: Streets Guide, and is asking members of public for feedback in shaping new residential developments (**details below**).

The Streets Guide is part of the Suffolk Design initiative which is where District and Borough planning authorities and the County Council are working together to improve the design criteria and guidance for new developments across the county.

The guide seeks to draw together national policies, guidance and other best practice and set within the Suffolk context. It covers more than just technical standards for roads, as requirements for footpaths, cycleways, utilities, sustainable drainage are also set out.

Councillor Andrew Reid, Suffolk County Council’s Cabinet Member for Highways, Transport and Rural Affairs, said:

“The Suffolk Design: Streets Guide sets out a different approach that focuses on the needs of all users rather than designing for motorised traffic first. By doing this, the opportunities for walking and cycling can be designed into and surrounding new developments and not treated as afterthoughts.

“The new guidance seeks to help designers and all local councils to understand and plan for streets that support sustainable travel, that are attractive places yet easy to maintain, and that reflect Suffolk’s heritage and landscape.”

Councillor Richard Rout, Suffolk County Council’s Cabinet Member for Environment and Public Protection, said:

“I welcome this update to the existing guidance. Our streets function in many different ways, not just for cars to pass along or park. Streets are also places where people meet, where trees and other plants grow and how energy is conveyed for our homes and businesses.

“All these different elements need careful consideration as we look forward to a low carbon future and adapt to climate change.”

The consultation is open until **5pm** on **Wednesday 10 February 2021**. Members of the public can take part by visiting, www.suffolk.gov.uk/suffolkstreets.

Suffolk wins the Most Innovative Family Information Service award

On the 16th December, Suffolk won the Most Innovative Family Information Service award at the National Association of Family Information Service Awards (NAFIS), 2020.

The award highlights the work undertaken to adapt Suffolk’s online Community Services Directory, **Suffolk InfoLink** (www.suffolk.gov.uk/infolink), to meet the public’s rapidly changing needs during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Community Information Team and teams across the children and young people’s directorate worked together with thousands of community partners to collate and provide information to support to the public. Many service providers in the voluntary and community sector were quick to adapt their offer and were supported to use Suffolk InfoLink to promote these opportunities to the public.

There are 7000 community organisation records provided on InfoLink so this allowed teams to communicate information quickly to thousands of sector partners, and the voluntary sector, and report progress to relevant government departments. On a week-by-week basis Suffolk Infolink was updated to highlight which childcare providers were open for vulnerable children, and key workers such as NHS staff during the first National Lockdown which was an essential element of the Covid rapid response.

As well as helping key workers to find childcare, these developments also supported Suffolk’s Track and Trace, Home but Not Alone and the Suffolk Advice and Support Service and provided ‘easy to use’ access to essential information including financial help and food banks.

Councillor Mary Evans, Cabinet Member for Children’s Services, Education and Skills said:

“I am delighted Suffolk has won this award for our Family Information Service, and its work with our Community Information Team in Public Health. The work of these teams to adapt our Community Directory Infolink has helped many families and businesses gain access to essential services and information during the covid-19 pandemic.

“I would like to thank both teams, our supplier Idox Ltd who were involved in this work, and in particular many of the 7000 partners in the voluntary and community sector who use Infolink to promote their services and support to the public during the pandemic.”

Green light given for Council's new housing joint venture company

On the 9th December, Suffolk County Council's Cabinet gave the go ahead to create a joint venture company to lead new housing developments on some of its own land.

Since 2019 the county council, as a major landowner in Suffolk (the 3rd biggest in the County), has been investigating how it can do more with its own assets to support district and borough councils in their role as strategic housing authorities, boost the supply of much needed housing in the county and ensure more of its land is being used to create social value within communities.

The decision follows months of detailed preparation, which saw strategic real estate advisor Avison Young and multinational law firm Pinsent Masons appointed by Concertus Design and Property Consultants Ltd; the Service Delivery Group of the council's Corporate Property Division. Their role was to consider delivery and viability options for a range of potential sites across the county with a view to consider how best to bring each forward for development.

As part of this appointment, and in accordance with the original decision of Cabinet in January, the newly appointed advisors also assessed the option of creating a new joint venture company to manage development of the largest potential sites. A business plan for the joint venture was presented to a meeting of Suffolk County Council's Cabinet on the 16th where it was agreed to proceed to the next phase.

Councillor Nick Gowrley, Cabinet Member for Housing said:

"This is an important milestone for our housing approach, and I wish to thank Avison Young and Pinsent Masons for their work in pulling this comprehensive business case together. Whilst this new joint venture will represent a major part of bringing forward specific land assets for development, it will still only be one part of our overall approach to housing. Those sites not considered suitable for the joint venture, due to size or scheme objectives, will be developed in more traditional ways, such as by sale to a local housing developer."

New cycle parking installed thanks to Government's emergency Active Travel Fund – Bury St Edmunds and Haverhill

On the 8th December, new cycle parking was installed in Bury St Edmunds and Haverhill as a result of the Government's Emergency Active Travel Fund to help make cycling safer.

One of the positives to come out of the COVID-19 crisis is the noticeable increase in people cycling. Whether that is for commuting to work to avoid overcrowding the transport network, for leisure or as part of people's daily exercise.

This has resulted in reduced congestion and improvements in air quality as well as supporting people's health and wellbeing.

In Haverhill, the parking racks have been installed on the High Street and outside the Bus Station.

In Bury St Edmunds two cycle parking racks have been installed on St Andrew Street South.

The locations for the cycle parking were selected in partnership with West Suffolk Council and supports the vision for their town centre masterplans. A third cycle parking rack in Bury St Edmunds has been installed outside the parade of shops on Westgate Street.

Councillor Andrew Reid, Suffolk County Council’s Cabinet Member for Highways, Transport and Rural Affairs, said:

“Many residents in Suffolk have embraced cycling during the pandemic, so we have a real opportunity here to make cycling safer and easier not just for this unprecedented period, but for the future as well to reap the associated health and pollution benefits.

“To get more people cycling long term we need to ensure there are enough places for them to safely store their bikes, so I am really pleased it is now easier to access Bury St Edmunds and Haverhill town centres on two wheels.

“I hope the facilities will encourage more people to grab their helmet and give it a go.”

Councillor Susan Glossop, Cabinet Member for Growth at West Suffolk Council said:

“We are pleased more cycle parking is being introduced by Suffolk County Council at trial locations in Bury St Edmunds and Haverhill town centres. We had strong public engagement in shaping the town centre masterplans with many public comments calling for more places to store and lock up bicycles in the town centres.

“Furthermore, it supports our commitment to the environment and improving public health, by encouraging people to not use the car to come into our town centres.”

Suffolk County Council’s efforts and commitment to active travel have been praised by the DfT, which is why the county council has been awarded a further £1.685 million in tranche two from the Emergency Active Travel Fund.

To keep up to date with how Suffolk County Council is making it safer and easier for residents to choose active and sustainable travel modes – visit www.suffolk.gov.uk/adviceontravel

Proposal for new recycling centre for Haverhill

On the 7th December, Suffolk County Council, FCC Environment and West Suffolk Council opted to investigate the feasibility of building a new recycling centre for Haverhill.

The option of a site at Homefield Road could provide a bigger recycling centre with improved access which would lead to less congestion and queuing.

The current Haverhill recycling centre site at Chalkstone Way has previously been identified as requiring improvements or relocation as part of the council’s programme

of recycling centre improvements. The current size and footprint of the site will not be sufficient for the forecast housing growth currently projected in the area.

Early plans for the new site involve designing out the need for steps, making it safer and easier for people to recycle their rubbish and also removing the need for the site to close for bin changes as the operational vehicles would be kept separate from the public.

Councillor Paul West, Suffolk County Council cabinet member for waste, said:

“This is an opportunity to improve on the service provided in Haverhill to ensure that the centre is fit for purpose for many years to come. The site at Homefield Road is ideally located and offers a more cost-effective solution for the Haverhill area. We are currently in discussions with stakeholders on the feasibility of these plans and are undertaking site investigation works.”

New public health report focuses on improving health for everyone

On the 3rd December, a new report was published by the director of public health which set out a blueprint for improving health for Suffolk residents, following the coronavirus pandemic.

The report, *A Time to Change: Working Towards Better Health for all in Suffolk* was published on the 3rd December and is available from www.healthysuffolk.org.uk. The report was procured alongside partner organisations, community member and volunteers.

The independent report makes four key recommendations, calling on residents, local communities, and partner organisations with influence over health and wellbeing to act now to level the playing field and improve opportunities for everyone to live healthier lives:

1. Suffolk needs to **put health inequalities at the heart of what we do** and strengthen our approach to health outcomes for everyone in our community – finding ways to reduce the gaps, in a fair and balanced way.
2. The best way to reduce inequalities is by involving communities, and to always build in **active community participation**.
3. The way we collect, use and link relevant **data** about health inequalities needs to be improved in Suffolk to inform evidence-based approaches that will have an impact.
4. Managing health inequalities is continual, so we need to regularly **measure and review progress** and recognise the changes we are making need to be maintained for the long term.

Stuart Keeble, Suffolk’s Director of Public Health, said:

“2020 has been a very different, and difficult year, for many of us. We know that the coronavirus pandemic has affected some people and some communities more than others, worsening the inequalities that were already present in our county. That is why health inequalities is the theme of my report this year.

Health inequalities have been present in our society for a long time and are contributed to by factors including quality of housing, education, access to a good job, life opportunities, as well as what we eat, drink and whether we smoke. Covid-19 has brought many of these factors into sharp focus and this report sets out important recommendations for how we can address these issues collectively as no single organisation or individual can make a large difference on their own.”