A Report for Little Cornard Parish Council Meeting on 18th November 2025
From James Finch – County Councillor for the Stour Valley

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➢ Ofsted Focused Visit finds 'early signs of improvement' in Front Door Children's Services

The report noted 'early signs of improvement beginning to emerge. These include

- Children identified as at risk of harm receive prompt and appropriate responses with strong oversight and swift multi-agency collaboration
- Clear investment and support from the whole council for children's services
- High staff morale, stable workforce, strong peer and managerial support maintaining consistency for families despite leadership changes

However the report also highlighted the following areas which still need for improvement:

- Monitoring systems need to more reliably flag delays and support effective management decision-making
- More consistency in professional curiosity and threshold decisions needed
- Better recognition and response needed to pattern of concern when multiple or repeated requests are made for the same families

Since the ILACS report in August 2024, which found that the authority's children's services 'Require Improvement to be Good', Suffolk County Council's children's services have been on a transformation journey.

We welcome the report and opportunity to receive this focused visit from Ofsted. I am pleased to say that Ofsted's findings were very much as we expected. The focused visit has demonstrated that we know our service well; we know our strengths and where we are making good progress, but we also know where we need to continue to improve in this very complex area.

➢ Suffolk's recycling centres raise half a million pounds for charity

The Benjamin Foundation, which operates re-use shops at Suffolk's recycling centres in Bury St Edmunds and Foxhall, is benefitting from the money to provide local families with childcare, mental health, youth, family and housing support services.

The half-million-pound milestone came during the national Second-Hand September campaign this year, with people pledging not to buy anything new during the month.

The relationship between The Benjamin Foundation and the county council's recycling centres is helping us to protect the environment, as well as supporting our residents.

A key part of this success story is the repair and resale of white goods. They are collected at Suffolk's recycling centres, repaired by The Benjamin Foundation's skilled technicians and sold in their charity shops, giving them a second life and helping families

➢ Mapping project reaches major digital milestone

Suffolk County Council has reached a major digital milestone in putting the county on the map.

It has completed the Definitive Map and Statement (DM&S) consolidation project, using modern background mapping to prepare the updated legal record of public rights of way (PROW) such as footpaths, bridleways, and byways in Suffolk. The consolidation project is the process of preparing a new digital DM&S that incorporates all legal changes since the previous issue.

Moving away from hand-drawn maps and written notes, the council has created new versions of the maps from a digital database using specialist software against Ordnance Survey Master map base mapping. It has involved checking and digitising more than 10,500 individual routes across the county, ensuring they reflect the effects of more than 2,600 legal orders, including complex public path order packages.

This ensures that Suffolk's PROW network — which extends across thousands of miles of countryside — is properly recorded and accessible for generations to come. The updated Definitive Maps are clearer and easier to interpret and working from a digital database makes it easier to share data with a wide range of partners, including user groups, councils, developers, the National Trust, Natural England, and the Forestry Commission.

Working copies of the maps are available for the public to view and download from the Rights of Way and Access pages of the Suffolk County Council website.

➢ Suffolk residents safer than ever due to 70% increase in Home Fire Safety Visits (HFSV)

This increase in tailored fire safety advice and support comes as Candle Fire Safety Week (20–26 October) coincides with Diwali, the Festival of Lights (20 October), celebrated by Hindu, Sikh, and Jain communities, when homes are illuminated with candles and oil lamps (diyas). The timing serves as a timely reminder as Christmas approaches of the importance of fire safety, particularly when using open flames in the home.

For Suffolk residents, individuals who qualify for a Home Fire Safety Visit (HFSV) are visited by a specialist practitioner or operational firefighters who will help create a tailored home fire safety plan. Those deemed most at risk also receive free smoke alarms or specialist equipment.

This includes the elderly, individuals with hearing or sight impairments, those with limited mobility, and people living with dementia, who may have a reduced ability to respond quickly to fire hazards. Factors contributing to this elevated risk include physical frailty, cognitive impairments, and the use of medications affecting alertness and mobility.

To help identify the most vulnerable in the community, the team has integrated with SafeLink, an online platform that allows residents or their carers to complete a virtual home fire safety check.

Based on the data entered, the platform alerts the Prevention Team to those considered most vulnerable and at higher risk. This approach ensures fire safety support reaches as many people as possible while prioritising additional resources for those who need it most. People deemed as low risk will still receive a bespoke Home Fire Action Plan.

Despite being one of the smallest fire prevention teams in the country, the Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service Prevention Team, has transformed home fire safety delivery across Suffolk.

The growth in HFSVs reflects improvements in working practices, stronger community engagement, staff training, and targeted support for vulnerable residents, ensuring help reaches those most at risk.

Our focus is always on protecting residents where the risk of harm from fire is greatest – in their homes. Every visit and educational session increases the likelihood that domestic fires can be prevented.

With nearly 850 accidental fires each year across England started by candles, this month is a perfect opportunity to remind everyone to take simple precautions. Keep candles and oil lamps away from flammable materials such as curtains, decorations and soft furnishings, place them on stable surfaces out of reach of children and pets, never leave them unattended, ensure they are properly extinguished, and make sure smoke alarms are installed and working.

➢ Tom's race with new foster carers

What started as a small local project in the Midlands is now a major nationwide campaign involving over 90 local authority fostering services, project managed by CAN Digital. 'The Run' is set to be the most ambitious jointly funded fostering film project yet.

The film focuses on Tom, an 11-year-old boy, contrasting his need to run - away from danger, a chaotic home life, to get to school in time for breakfast club because he's hungry - with running as a sport.

Despite the disadvantages Tom faces before being fostered – not even having PE kit for school – he's good at running and the film climaxes with Tom taking part in an athletics tournament, running in a stadium, with the support of his new foster family.

It's Tom's chance to shine. Can Tom win his race? On the track and in his life?

The message of this project is very simple, but so important – we need foster carers, and we need people to foster for Suffolk County Council.

This sentiment applies across the country, which is why this project has grown into a national campaign. 'The Run' is a brilliant, emotional film none of us could have produced on our own, which is why this partnership is so important.

Fostering is a flexible role with options for short term care from a weekend a month to longer term opportunities, all providing life-changing support for local children. If you want to find out more about what it's like to foster or adopt with us, please call a member of the team on 01473 264800

My Priorities

Education - Supporting Vulnerable People - Jobs and Growth - Localism and the Stour Valley - Building on Suffolk's Strength all underpinned by strong financial management and fair council tax.