El Niño 2026–27

Preparing for Severe Weather & Disruption in Suffolk

A practical guide for employees and managers on staying safe, maintaining services and supporting communities during severe weather events — including the increased risk posed by the developing El Niño pattern in 2026.

What is this guide for

The Met Office has briefed Suffolk's Local Resilience Forum that a very strong El Niño event is likely in 2026, raising the probability of wetter, windier and more unsettled conditions across the UK during autumn and early winter. Flooding, storms, power cuts and difficult travel could all affect workplaces, IT systems, staff and the residents.

Who this guide is for

Every employee has a role in preparedness — whether you work in an office, school, library, depot, community setting, on the road or from home. This guide explains what El Niño means for Suffolk, what disruption could look like, and the practical steps you and your team can take right now.

What is El Niño?

El Niño is a naturally occurring climate phenomenon involving unusually warm ocean temperatures in the central and eastern tropical Pacific. It forms part of the El Niño–Southern Oscillation (ENSO) cycle and occurs every few years.

Although it develops far from the UK, it can influence the probability of wetter, windier or colder conditions during the British winter.

The Met Office confirms that a very strong El Niño event is likely, with a greater chance of unsettled UK weather during autumn and early winter and possible colder conditions later in the season.

Forecast and planning signal for Suffolk

The Met Office three-month outlook for October–December 2026 indicated an increased chance of wetter and windier conditions across the UK. These are UK-wide probabilities, not a Suffolk-specific forecast, but they provide an important planning signal for local businesses.

40%
Wetter than average
Twice the usual likelihood of wetter-than-average conditions across the UK, October–December 2026

30%
Milder than average
1.5 times the usual likelihood of milder conditions. Windier conditions are also considered more likely than usual.

5
Flood sources
Suffolk faces five principal flooding types: surface water, river, coastal, groundwater and sewer flooding.

How Could Your Organization Be Affected?

Severe weather can disrupt business operations across many fronts simultaneously. Roads, buildings, schools and community facilities could become inaccessible due to flooding or storm damage. Loss of electricity or connectivity could interrupt offices, libraries, digital systems, telephony and electronic records. Cold weather, snow and ice could make travel unsafe and create additional needs among vulnerable residents. Meanwhile, demand on highways, adult social care, children's services, public health, customer services and emergency planning teams may all increase during severe weather periods.

Flooding & Heavy Rainfall

Roads, buildings, schools and community facilities could become inaccessible. Home visits, waste, highways, care services and inter-site travel may all be disrupted.

Storms & Strong Winds

Fallen trees, structural damage, unsafe outdoor conditions and blocked roads could affect staff safety, building access and operational service delivery.

Power & Comms Outages

Loss of electricity or connectivity could interrupt offices, libraries, IT systems, telephony, electronic records and specialist equipment.

Cold Weather & Travel

Snow, ice and low temperatures could make travel unsafe, affect service delivery and generate additional need among vulnerable Suffolk residents.

What Every Employee Should Do

Whether you work in an office building, on the road, in a school or from home, there are clear and practical steps you can take now, before severe weather strikes, to protect yourself, support your colleagues and maintain the services Suffolk residents depend on.

Being prepared is not just about your workplace: it also means thinking ahead at home and planning for difficult travel conditions.

Stay Informed

- ○ Monitor Met Office weather warnings and local travel information regularly.
- ○ Familiarise yourself with Suffolk Prepared's advice on flooding, storms and power cuts.
- ○ Check official staff communications for changes to buildings, working arrangements or service delivery.
- ○ Ensure your manager holds accurate, up-to-date work contact details for you.
- ○ Know where to find your team's emergency and business continuity procedures.
- ○ Use shorter-range forecasts and official warnings for day-to-day decisions — do not assume a seasonal outlook means a specific event will occur.

Prepare for Work Disruption

- ○ Consider how your duties would be affected if you could not access your normal workplace or use essential IT systems. Where relevant:
- ○ Confirm that you can access authorised work systems from alternative locations.
- ○ Keep essential work devices charged and in working condition.
- ○ Know how to contact your manager if work systems are unavailable.
- ○ Identify activities requiring in-person attendance.
- ○ Follow information security and data protection requirements when working remotely.
- ○ Know which activities should stop if the required equipment, premises or staffing are unsafe.

Prepare for Disruption at Home

- ○ Maintain an emergency kit containing torches, batteries, medication, essential contact numbers, bottled water and other necessary items.
- ○ Check your household flood risk.
- ○ Prepare for possible loss of electricity, heating or water.
- ○ Consider the needs of vulnerable family members or neighbours.

Plan for Difficult Journeys

- ○ Check warnings, road conditions and public transport information.
- ○ Allow for delays and avoid unsafe routes such as roads affected by floodwater, ice, fallen trees or high winds.
- ○ Follow local advice and travel guidance.

⊗ **Never drive through floodwater**

Flooding: What Staff Should Know and Do

- Check whether your home or workplace could be affected by flooding.
- Sign up for Environment Agency flood warnings where available.
- Know how to access weather and flood information.
- Familiarise yourself with workplace evacuation arrangements.
- Keep important documents and contact information accessible.
- Report visible drainage problems or recurring flood concerns through appropriate channels.

Flood Warnings

Flood Alert — Prepare
Flooding is possible. Monitor conditions and prepare to follow the relevant workplace or household flood plan.

Flood Warning — Act
Flooding is expected. Prioritise safety, protect essential equipment if safe and follow evacuation instructions.

Severe Flood Warning — Danger to Life
Move or remain in a safe location, follow emergency services' advice and call 999 if in immediate danger.

If Flooding Affects Your Workplace

Stop work
Where conditions are unsafe and follow site emergency procedures immediately.

Inform your manager
Using established reporting arrangements.

Do not walk or drive
Through floodwater, do not approach electrical equipment in or near floodwater, and turn off utilities only if safe and authorised.

Follow evacuation
Instructions from building managers and emergency services and do not return until authorised and safe.

Power Cuts: Working Safely During Electricity Outages

Before a power cut

- Know how to contact your manager.
- Keep devices charged.
- Understand which activities and services at your site depend on electricity.

During a power cut

- Use torches or battery powered lighting rather than candles.
- Check whether emergency lighting and other safety system are functioning.
- Follow instructions from the building or service manager.
- Avoid using equipment or facilities that may be unsafe without power.
- Do not attempt electrical repair unless authorised.
- 105 Report local outages by calling 105.

Power is restored

- Wait for required safety checks or authorisation before restarting equipment.

Storms, Snow, Ice and Difficult Conditions

Before severe weather

- Check forecasts and warnings.
- Understand your site-specific precautions and arrangements.
- Review planned journeys or outdoor activities.

During severe weather

- Avoid unnecessary exposure to hazards including unstable trees, damaged roofs, fallen power lines and flooded roads.
- If you work outdoors, drive for work or visit resident, follow operational risk assessments and safe working arrangements, like postponing visits where risks cannot be adequately controlled

After severe weather

- Report hazards through highways, property, facilities or management channels
- Do not attempt dangerous repairs

Managers & Service Teams Maintaining Essential Services

Effective resilience planning involves identifying critical activities, understanding key dependencies, establishing temporary alternatives, assigning decision-makers and putting recovery arrangements in place. This period of heightened weather risk is an opportunity for managers and service leads to review existing plans and confirm that your team is ready. Dense, well-prepared plans — tested and understood by all relevant staff — are what allow services to continue when conditions are difficult.



Essential Services

Which activities must continue during severe weather? Identify your team's critical functions and the minimum staffing and resources required to maintain them safely.



Staffing

What happens if employees cannot travel or are unavailable? Confirm cover arrangements, escalation contacts and any authorisation required for remote or alternative working.



Buildings & Premises

Can services operate if normal premises are inaccessible? Identify alternative locations, confirm access arrangements and know how to communicate changes to staff and service users.



IT & Utilities

How would the team operate without electricity, connectivity or key systems? Confirm contingency arrangements exist for essential systems and that staff know how to access them.



Service Users

Who may be particularly affected if services are delayed or unavailable? Ensure that the most vulnerable individuals are identified and that appropriate arrangements are in place.



Suppliers & Comms

What happens if deliveries, contractors or commissioned services are disrupted? Confirm how staff, partners and service users will receive updates, and who will coordinate recovery.

Additional Considerations by Service Area



Adult Social Care & Community Services

Consider how disruption could affect essential visits, continuity of care, commissioned providers and people reliant on support. Follow service-specific contingency and escalation procedures.



Children's Services & Education

Review arrangements for essential contact with children and families, access to buildings, transport disruption and communication with relevant settings.



Highways, Transport & Operations

Follow service-specific adverse-weather procedures, including safe deployment of staff and incident reporting arrangements.



Libraries, Offices & Public Buildings

Review evacuation arrangements, access, staffing, communication with visitors and procedures for unsafe or unavailable premises.



Commissioning & Procurement

Consider service-provider resilience and the potential for disruption to essential suppliers. Confirm escalation routes and alternative arrangements where possible.

How Staff Can Support Communities



Direct residents to official weather, **flood and emergency preparedness information.**



Follow safeguarding and referral arrangements where someone may need additional support**.**



Share only **verified information** through authorised communication channels.



Avoid speculation and refer all media requests and public statements to authorised communications colleagues.



Help residents understand **where to report problems.**



Employees should not independently organise emergency response activities outside their assigned duties.

Your Preparedness Checklist & Essential Contacts

Your Severe Weather Preparedness Checklist

Use this checklist to confirm your personal readiness. Managers are encouraged to share this with their teams and discuss any gaps before severe weather is forecast. All ten items should be completed by every employee.

- I know where to find Met Office weather and Environment Agency flood warnings.
- I understand the main severe weather risks affecting my work location and travel.
- I know my workplace's emergency and evacuation procedures.
- I have the correct contact arrangements for my line manager.
- I know what to do if I cannot safely travel to work.
- I know how to report a building, equipment or IT disruption.
- I understand which work activities cannot continue safely during an outage.
- I know where to find relevant business continuity or service contingency arrangements.
- I have considered basic emergency preparedness at home.
- I understand how to direct residents to trusted information without sharing unverified updates

Essential Emergency Contacts

Having the right contacts to hand and knowing where to find authoritative information is as important as any other aspect of preparedness. The table below brings together key emergency and professional support contacts. Bookmark this page and ensure your team knows these details before disruption occurs, not during it

Situation	Contact	Number / Channel
Immediate danger to life	Emergency services	**999**
Power cut	National power helpline	**105**
Flood alerts & warnings	Environment Agency Floodline	**0345 988 1188**
Environmental incident	EA Incident Hotline	**0800 80 70 60**
Gas emergency	National Gas Emergency	**0800 111 999**
Police non-emergency	Suffolk Police	**101**
NHS urgent non-emergency	NHS 111	**111**
Work safety & service disruption	Line manager / duty manager	First point of contact
Emergency planning enquiries	Suffolk JEPU	01473 265321
Business continuity enquiries	SCC Business Continuity Team	Business.Continuity@suffolk.gov.uk

Official Resources & Further Guidance

Suffolk Resilience Forum

www.suffolkprepared.co.uk — Local emergency preparedness, flood safety, power cuts and business continuity information.

Environment Agency — Flood Information

www.gov.uk/check-flooding — View flood alerts, warnings, river information and business flood plan checklists.

Met Office — Weather Warnings

www.metoffice.gov.uk — Check the latest warnings for rain, wind, snow and ice. Sign up for WeatherReady alerts.

Suffolk County Council

www.suffolk.gov.uk — Local flood risk management information and the Flood Smart Living guide.

Preparation today helps us stay safe and continue supporting Suffolk tomorrow. The potential influence of El Niño on UK weather is a reminder that disruption can arrive at any time. By staying informed, following safe working procedures, understanding business continuity arrangements and supporting effective communication, every employee helps protect themselves, their colleagues and the people who depend their organisation's services.

Who reports flooding?

Main rivers/sea: Environment Agency (0800 80 70 60).

Public roads/highway drains: Suffolk Highways.

Smaller watercourses/groundwater: Your local council.

Sewers/water mains: Your water company.

Immediate danger: 999.

Prepared and Published by

@Suffolk Resilience Forum

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*For further information and to download this guide, visit **www.suffolkprepared.co.uk**.*