



Kernos Centre
Taking counselling further

Strategic Plan

2026-2029

Contents Page

01	Executive Summary
02	Message from the Chair of Kernos
03	Message from the CEO of Kernos
04	Who we are
05	Who we support
06	Our services
07	Vision, Mission and Values
08–12	Strategic Themes
13	Organisation wide outcomes
14	Closing statement
15–16	Appendix 1: Financial planning, forecasting and sustainability framework
17–18	Appendix 2: Community profile and needs

“Counselling at Kernos made a massive difference. it helped me open up, make positive changes, and see life from a new, hopeful perspective. It has truly helped me heal and move forward. My counsellor has supported me in ways I can never fully explain.”

Disclaimer: Service User Quotes
All quotes included in this document are anonymised and are taken from Kernos service users. Full informed consent has been obtained for the use of their feedback for reporting, evaluation, and promotional purposes. All identifying details have been removed or altered to protect confidentiality in line with safeguarding and data protection requirements.

Executive Summary

The Kernos Centre's 2026–2029 Strategic Plan sets out our response to increasing demand for emotional wellbeing support, rising complexity of need, and a challenging external funding environment. It builds on over 20 years of trusted community-based counselling and provides a clear framework to strengthen impact, resilience, and long-term sustainability.

Over the next three years, the Kernos Centre will:

- Focus on improving access to timely, high-quality counselling while ensuring the organisation is equipped to meet growing and increasingly complex need, alongside the continued delivery of person-centred, inclusive support for children, young people, and adults.
- Diversify income streams, improve financial forecasting, and proactively manage funding risk, including the planned reduction of time-limited income sources. A Financial Planning, Forecasting and Sustainability Framework, together with arrangements for maintaining a rolling three-year financial forecast, is set out in Appendix 1.
- Enhance operational effectiveness through the modernisation of systems and service infrastructure, including the development of digital communication tools that improve efficiency and service responsiveness.
- Invest in organisational capability and workforce resilience, ensuring Kernos has the capacity, structure, and leadership required to deliver sustainable and high-quality services.
- Strengthen the Kernos Centre's role within the wider mental health system through partnership working, co-production, and the meaningful integration of lived experience. Equality, diversity, and inclusion will remain embedded across all areas of service delivery, governance, and organisational development.



Message from the Chair – David Morris

Mental health has become one of the defining challenges of our time. Every day, more people are reaching out for support, often after waiting too long or finding that help simply isn't available when they need it most. Community organisations like Kernos have never been more important.

As Trustees, our responsibility extends beyond overseeing today's services. We must ensure that Kernos continues to thrive for the people who will need us tomorrow, next year, and for decades to come. This strategy represents our commitment to building an organisation that is not only compassionate in its care, but resilient, sustainable, and ambitious in its future.

Over the last year, we have strengthened our governance, welcomed our first Chief Executive Officer, invested in our leadership, and built upon our already strong foundations that will enable Kernos to grow old with confidence. These changes are not about becoming a different organisation; they are about ensuring we remain true to our purpose while increasing the impact we can have across our communities.

This Strategic Plan sets out a clear direction of travel. It is ambitious because the need is great, but it is also grounded in the belief that lasting change is achieved through strong partnerships, sound governance, financial sustainability and, above all, exceptional people. We will continue to place our clients at the heart of every decision we make, while ensuring the organisation has the strength and resilience to meet growing demand.

I would like to thank our staff, counsellors, volunteers, trustees, partners, funders and every individual who chooses to support Kernos. Together, you make it possible for thousands of people to find hope, resilience, and a path forward.

The future will undoubtedly bring new challenges, but it also brings extraordinary opportunity. By working together, remaining true to our values, and never losing sight of why Kernos exists, I am confident we will continue taking counselling further and changing lives for generations to come.



Message from the C.E.O – Michelle Argent

Since Kernos was founded in 2003, it has been guided by a simple belief: that everyone deserves access to compassionate, professional emotional wellbeing support, regardless of their circumstances. For over two decades, Kernos has provided trusted counselling and emotional wellbeing services within our communities, supporting children, young people, and adults through a wide range of challenges.

Since my appointment at the end of 2025, we have taken important steps to modernise and enhance how we work. I am honoured to be leading Kernos into a new phase of strategic development, with a focus on collaboration, co-production, partnership working, and increasing our impact in response to growing demand.

This Strategic Plan sets out our priorities for 2026–2029. It builds on our strengths as a person-centred organisation committed to accessibility, quality, and inclusion, while ensuring we are well placed to meet rising demand and increasingly complex need. We will focus on improving access to support, securing long-term sustainability, investing in our people, and strengthening partnerships to deliver positive outcomes for the communities we serve.

I am continually reminded of the difference Kernos makes. It is a privilege to see the transformation that occurs when people are given the support they need to move forward. I am deeply proud of everyone involved with Kernos, whose dedication changes lives every day.

I would like to thank everyone who supports Kernos. I am especially grateful to the children, young people, and adults who place their trust in us during some of the most challenging times in their lives. Your courage and the confidence you place in our services inspire everything we do. Without the commitment of our staff, volunteers, trustees, partners, funders, and supporters, our work would not be possible. As we deliver this Strategic Plan, we will continue taking counselling further—building on our foundations, responding to changing needs, and ensuring high-quality emotional wellbeing support remains accessible to all.



Who we are

Kernos is a person-centred counselling service working in line with BACP ethical standards, placing the individual’s needs, lived experience, and autonomy at the heart of the therapeutic process.

It is committed to providing a safe, confidential, and supportive environment where people can explore emotional and psychological difficulties at their own pace.

Founded in 2003, Kernos has developed a strong reputation as a trusted provider of high-quality, accessible counselling and emotional wellbeing support for children, young people, and adults experiencing a wide range of emotional and psychological distress.

Over time, the organisation has grown in response to local need, developing flexible approaches that support individuals with varying levels of complexity and vulnerability.

Kernos plays a vital role within the local mental health landscape, bridging the gap between overstretched statutory services and cost-prohibitive private therapy. By doing so, it ensures that access to counselling remains affordable, ethical, and inclusive, particularly for those who might otherwise face barriers to support.

Our work is grounded in early intervention, prevention, and improving long-term wellbeing outcomes for individuals and communities.

“I struggled with anxiety and often shut down or cried. Education felt overwhelming, and my general happiness was consumed by fear.

Counselling at Kernos has helped me feel more confident, happier, and able to socialise. I now enjoy my time at college and with my friends much more.”



Who we support

Kernos provides community-based counselling for children, young people and adults experiencing a wide range of emotional and psychological difficulties.

These include anxiety, trauma, bereavement, abuse, relationship and family challenges, stress, and low self-esteem, as well as the wider impact of adverse life experiences. We also support neurodivergent individuals who may benefit from tailored and flexible approaches to emotional wellbeing support.

Many of those who access our services face significant barriers to timely support, including long waiting times within statutory services, financial constraints, and geographical isolation. For some, these barriers are compounded by the complexity of their needs or difficulties in accessing services that feel appropriate, accessible, and responsive.

Kernos seeks to address these challenges by providing early access to counselling within a safe, confidential, and community-based setting.

Our approach is flexible and person-centred, enabling us to respond to individual needs and reduce the inequalities that can prevent people from receiving the support they need when they need it most.

“Living with trauma, undiagnosed autism, and a rare illness left me isolated and exhausted.

My counsellor at Kernos couldn't change my health, but gave me space to be heard. In those sessions, I wasn't a burden or just 'sick' – I was myself again.”



Our services

Kernos delivers accessible, person-centred counselling and therapeutic support for children, young people, and adults.

Individual Counselling (Children, Young people and Adults)

- One-to-one face-to-face counselling
- Online counselling for flexibility and accessibility

Walk and Talk Therapy (Adults)

- Outdoor counselling in a natural environment
- Supports wellbeing through movement and a different therapeutic setting

Better Connected (Adult Relationships Service)

- Counselling for two adults in any type of relationship
- Supports communication, understanding, and relationship wellbeing



Vision

A future where everyone can access timely, affordable emotional wellbeing support, enabling healthier and more resilient lives.

Mission

Kernos provides accessible, professional counselling and emotional wellbeing support to people in need, ensuring that no one is excluded due to financial circumstances.

Values

- **Compassion** – We provide caring, respectful and non-judgemental support, ensuring people feel heard, valued, and safe when seeking help.
- **Integrity** – We act with honesty, courage, patience and respect. We do what is right, remain accountable, and uphold the trust placed in us by clients, partners and the wider community.
- **Collaboration** – We believe wellbeing is strengthened through connection. We work alongside clients, communities, and partners to build hope, belonging, and support where it is needed most.
- **Ambition** – We are committed to continuous improvement, strengthening Kernos in a sustainable way while keeping the needs of clients at the centre of decision-making.



Strategic Themes

2026–2029

The strategy is delivered through annual operational plans supported by KPI dashboards, quarterly reporting, and annual review against agreed outcomes and baselines established in Year 1.

Theme 1 – Accessible, High-Quality Service Delivery

We will:

- **Strengthen counselling services** to ensure they are timely, effective, and accessible, with a focus on reducing waiting times and improving access to support.
- **Increase mental health awareness** through online self-help resources, targeted training, and community engagement, including digital and social media outreach.
- **Deliver flexible, person-centred services to meet diverse needs**, including face-to-face counselling, online sessions, walk-and-talk therapy, and relationship counselling, enabling people to access support in the way that best suits them.
- **Provide support to individuals** presenting with increasingly complex emotional and psychological needs, while remaining a non-crisis service.
- **Maintain high standards of service delivery** through robust clinical governance, supervision, and continuous quality improvement, informed by evaluation, audit, and feedback.
- **Review and develop geographical reach** in line with increasing demand, organisational capacity, and accessibility needs.

● Theme 2 – Sustainable Growth & Organisation Resilience

We will:

- **Strengthen Kernos' long-term sustainability** through the diversification of income streams.
- **Increase the proportion of unrestricted income** to support core service delivery and organisational stability.
- **Support sustainable growth** through strengthening fundraising, grant income generation, and community support activity.
- **Manage financial risk** proactively and ensure alignment of resources with strategic priorities.
- **Maintain robust financial planning and forecasting** processes to support informed decision-making and organisational governance
- **Improve operational efficiency** through the development and enhancement of digital systems and infrastructure, ensuring effective use of resources, strengthened data security, and compliance with regulatory requirements.

Theme 3 – People, Skill and Organisational Development

We will:

- **Invest in the skills, knowledge, and wellbeing** of our volunteers, self-employed counsellors, and trustees through high-quality supervision, peer support, and accessible learning and development opportunities, supporting reflective and ethical practice.
- **Promote a supportive, inclusive, and values-led culture** that prioritises wellbeing, professional support, and positive working relationships across the organisation.
- **Ensure our organisational structure** remains effective, sustainable, and fit for purpose, enabling safe, high-quality, and responsive service delivery.
- **Strengthen leadership and governance capacity** through robust trustee engagement, clear governance processes, and effective oversight of organisational direction and sustainability.
- **Maintain appropriate planning** to ensure continuity of services and organisational stability, recognising our reliance on a small core leadership team and a wider network of practitioners.

Theme 4 – Influence, Inclusion and System Impact

We will:

- **Strengthen our role** in shaping a more inclusive and effective mental health system through collaboration, co-production, and partnership working with local services and community organisations, ensuring Kernos contributes to wider system learning and improvement..
- **Advocate for the needs of clients** by working with local authorities, commissioners, health partners, and voluntary sector organisations to improve early intervention, reduce barriers to access, and strengthen pathways into support.
- **Develop a service user group** to embed lived experience in the design, delivery, and evaluation of Kernos services, ensuring that feedback directly informs service development and continuous improvement.
- **Enhance our visibility and voice** within the local mental health landscape by sharing learning, contributing to partnership forums, and promoting awareness of community-based counselling provision.
- **Embed equality, diversity, and inclusion** across all areas of service delivery, governance, and organisational culture, ensuring services are accessible, responsive, and appropriate for the diverse communities we serve.

● Organisation-wide Outcomes

We will measure our performance against the following organisation-wide outcomes:

- **Accessible, timely support**

(Theme 1: Accessible, High-Quality Service Delivery)

Measured through waiting times, service uptake, and client outcomes.

- **Financial resilience**

(Theme 2: Sustainable Growth and Organisational Resilience)

Measured through income diversification, reserves, and financial sustainability.

- **Workforce resilience and capability**

(Theme 3: People, Skills and Organisational Development)

Measured through retention, supervision, training, and wellbeing indicators.

- **System influence and engagement**

(Theme 4: Influence, Inclusion and System Impact)

Measured through partnership activity, service user involvement, and sector engagement.

“Before counselling with Kernos, I felt completely lost. After coming out of domestic abuse, anxiety was part of my daily life and even simple decisions felt overwhelming. I couldn’t trust my own judgement and felt unable to cope.

Counselling helped me untangle those feelings. I learned to understand my inner voice rather than fear it, and slowly began to feel more grounded and in control.

Most importantly, I felt truly heard without judgement. That space to be listened to helped me rebuild my confidence and find my way forward.”

Closing Statement

This Strategic Plan sets out Kernos' priorities for 2026–2029 in response to increasing demand for mental health support and a challenging external funding environment.

It reflects our commitment to accessible, high-quality counselling, long-term sustainability, and meaningful collaboration within the local mental health system.

Kernos will continue to develop as a trusted, community-based provider of emotional wellbeing support, ensuring timely and appropriate access for all, while strengthening long-term organisational resilience.

Kernos operates in accordance with its charitable objects as registered with the Charity Commission.

Kernos Centre charitable objects

a) The relief of sickness both of mind and body and distress arising therefrom by the provision of such counselling services and help in problems arising from their sickness as may be appropriate for individual needs

b) The advancement of education by the provision of training for counsellors and for dissemination of information to other persons (including professionals).

*Kernos registered charity no.
1097354*

1. Purpose

Kernos is committed to strengthening long-term financial resilience and ensuring robust governance of its resources. To support this, the organisation maintains structured financial planning processes aligned to its strategic objectives.

This includes the development and review of a rolling three-year financial forecast alongside a financial sustainability framework which includes projected income, expenditure, and reserves over the strategic period.

2. Three-Year Financial Forecast

Kernos will maintain a three-year forward financial forecast to support strategic planning, which will:

- Inform decision-making and long-term sustainability planning
- Support trustee oversight and governance
- Identify future funding requirements and risks
- Enable proactive management of income and expenditure trends
- Align financial planning with strategic priorities and service demand
- The forecast will be reviewed and updated regularly to reflect changes in funding, demand, and operational priorities.

3. Financial Sustainability Framework

Kernos will operate a financial sustainability framework designed to ensure long-term stability and resilience and will focus on:

- Diversification of income streams to reduce financial dependency risk
- Growth of unrestricted income to support core services
- Maintenance of appropriate financial reserves
- Alignment of resources with strategic priorities
- Ongoing monitoring of financial risk and opportunity
- Strengthening of fundraising, grant income, and community support activity.

Appendix 1 – Financial Planning, Forecasting and Sustainability Framework cont.../

4. Governance and Oversight

The financial forecast and sustainability framework will be reviewed as part of regular governance processes to ensure:

- Transparency and accountability in financial planning
- Informed decision-making by trustees
- Alignment between financial position and strategic objectives
- Early identification of financial risk or pressure points

5. Integration with Strategic Plan

This framework supports the delivery of Kernos' Strategic Themes (2026–2029), particularly:

- Sustainable Growth and Organisational Resilience
- Accessible and High-Quality Service Delivery
- Long-term organisational stability and risk management

Appendix 2 – Community Profile & Needs

1. Community Profile

- Sudbury is the largest town within the Babergh District and serves a wider rural population across South Suffolk and surrounding areas. The town has a built-up population of 23,912 (2021 Census).
- Suffolk has a lower proportion of children and young people than the national average and a growing ageing population, with increasing demand for health and social care services.
- Sudbury does not contain areas within the 20% most deprived nationally; however, there are pockets of relative deprivation within the wider area, alongside broader socio-economic inequalities across the district.
- Key employment sectors include manufacturing, retail, and health and social care, reflecting the town's industrial heritage.
- As a largely rural district, Babergh faces geographical barriers affecting access to services, employment, and transport connectivity.

2. Key Community Needs

- Increasing loneliness, isolation, and mental wellbeing needs
- Housing pressures, including affordability and supported accommodation needs
- Rising demand for health and social care linked to an ageing population and complex needs
- Transport and digital connectivity challenges in rural communities
- Skills gaps and lower-than-average wages compared to national figures

“I came to Kernos with anxiety related to my wife’s illness and found it difficult to cope without external support.

Counselling gave me a safe space to talk openly about my feelings. The service was very welcoming, friendly, and professional.

Having someone listen and help me understand my thoughts allowed me to come to terms with what was happening and cope better, so I didn’t feel so overwhelmed.”

Appendix 2 – Community Profile & Needs

3. Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing Context

Demand for mental health support continues to rise, driven by:

- social isolation and loneliness
- cost-of-living pressures
- rural access barriers
- long waiting times in statutory services
- increasing complexity of need
- rising demand among children and young people
- workforce stress and burnout

4. Role of Community-Based Support

Community-based organisations such as Kernos play a preventative role by:

- providing early intervention support
- reducing escalation of mental health difficulties
- supporting emotional resilience and recovery
- improving access to affordable local services
- reducing pressure on statutory services
- strengthening social connection and wellbeing

“During a very difficult period, I was facing poor health, major financial problems, and recovery from surgery. I was living in a caravan, unable to work, and felt stuck and overwhelmed.

Counselling became a turning point. It helped me understand that what I was going through was not my fault and gave me the space to focus on my own wellbeing. I began to rebuild my self-worth and learned ways to cope with what I was facing.

It gave me clarity, support, and the ability to move forward when I felt unable to do so alone.”

Appendix 2 – Community Profile & Needs cont.../

5. Voluntary Sector Context

The Suffolk voluntary and community sector is operating within a challenging environment, characterised by:

- Rising demand for services alongside increasing operational costs
- Workforce and volunteer capacity pressures
- Intense competition for funding and resources
- Challenges in recruitment and retention across the sector
-

Alongside these challenges, there are significant opportunities for development and growth, including:

- Increased collaboration and partnership working across sectors
- Expansion of social prescribing and community referral pathways
- Growth in community-based wellbeing and early intervention initiatives
- A stronger focus on preventative approaches to mental health and wellbeing
- Innovation in fundraising, engagement, and service delivery models

6. Strategic Response

Kernos will respond by:

- strengthening partnerships across the system
- diversifying and stabilising income
- investing in workforce wellbeing and support
- improving operational efficiency and resilience

“I came to Kernos at my lowest point, struggling with long-term depression and anxiety while waiting for further assessment. I felt overwhelmed, unsupported, and in crisis.

Kernos gave me a safe space to talk and access support when I believed I couldn’t afford it. The support I received helped me stabilise, begin to rebuild, and feel more in control of my life.

What made the biggest difference was being listened to and believed in.

Later, I went on to volunteer for Kernos. Being trusted and given that opportunity had a huge impact on my recovery, giving me confidence, purpose, and a sense that I could move forward again.”