

COUNTY COUNCILLOR REPORT FEBRUARY 2024

Budget 2024-25

A net budget of £528m budget in the face of the major cost, demand and funding challenges facing local government was agreed on 20 February.

Key headlines from the budget are:

- £122m of investment to meet demand and cost pressures next year – including £34.6m for inflation, £38m for legislative requirements, £39.7m for demand and demographic issues and £9.6m for policy decisions.
- £41.5m of new savings, including £9.6m from transforming how the council operates.
- A 4.99% increase in the County Council's share of Council Tax, in line with the Government's capping level (2.99% for general Council Tax and 2% for adult social care).

Some budget proposals have been identified as requiring consultation, as they may relate to a policy or service change. Cabinet will take decisions on these proposals in the summer, after considering the consultation results as follows:

- Street lighting: To switch off some streetlights across Norfolk in areas where it is considered safe and appropriate to do so.
- Norfolk Record Office: To introduce pre-booking of visits and change opening hours.
- Recycling centres: To reduce opening hours at some recycling centres to deliver a more consistent approach, in line with neighbouring authorities.

These consultation surveys are available via the link below.

<https://norfolk.citizenspace.com/consultation/savings-proposals-2024>

- Adult social care charges for non-residential care: Proposal to make some changes to the charging policy, Minimum Income Guarantee, which is an amount set aside to cover expenses for adults who receive care and support other than in a care home.
- Adult social care arrangement fee for self-funded care: Proposal to introduce an arrangement fee for people who self-fund their social care in line with Care Act 2014 guidance.

These consultation surveys are available via the links below:

<https://norfolk.citizenspace.com/consultation/arrangement-fee-consultation/>

<https://norfolk.citizenspace.com/health/non-residential-care-charging-policy/>

Footway upgrade Yarmouth Rd:

Following some recent email correspondence about the above, it has now been clarified that linked with the proposed development of EV Charging Station with associated Cafe Area, and an adjacent solar park Land to South Of A47 and North of Yarmouth Road (application 20211493) the development will provide a shared pedestrian footway / cycleway along the north of Yarmouth Road as previously secured for the previously consented retail store. This will provide a continuous off carriageway route for pedestrians and cyclists from the site to Blofield. The application has yet to be determined but NCC as the highways authority is supporting this.

Parish Partnership Awards

Cabinet will make the final decision on 4 March but Brundall PC proposals for a village gateway and signs are on the list of projects to be approved.

New Norfolk Rural Business Awards

Norfolk County Council and the Royal Norfolk Agricultural Association have joined forces to launch the new Norfolk Rural Business Awards.

The awards were announced at the recent annual Norfolk Farming Conference and are designed to recognise the essential nature and huge importance of Norfolk's rural communities and businesses to the region. They will highlight the very best of Norfolk from nine sponsored category areas aimed at showcasing a wide range of Norfolk's businesses, community groups and people.

Agriculture, forestry and fishing is the fourth largest sector in Norfolk, accounting for an estimated 8pc of all businesses - with many other businesses closely linked to the sector including those in accommodation, retail, food science, technology and engineering.

The award categories are: Best Rural Community Initiative; Best Farming Innovation Adopter; Best Food Producer; Norfolk's Unsung Hero; Best Drink Maker; Best Farming Champion; Best Emerging Talent; Best High Growth Business; Best Sustainable Land Use / Farming Exemplar.

Winners will receive a trophy, a certificate, and be able to use Norfolk Rural Awards branding in their promotions. They will be announced at the the Royal Norfolk Show in June.

Judging will include a visit to all shortlisted businesses, and each finalist will be asked to participate in a short film.

The entry deadline is 19 April 2024.

The entry form for nominations to each category can be found online [here](#)

Norfolk Flood Protection – delegation to Westminster

The threat posed by flooding and coastal erosion in Norfolk was laid out for MPs when Norfolk County Council took their case for change to the heart of Westminster on 31 January.

Norfolk faces regular risks of flooding and is ranked tenth most at risk of surface water flooding out of 149 local authority areas. Additionally, the county's position on the North Sea exposes it to tidal threats as well as significant coastal erosion.

The delegation from Norfolk, led by the Norfolk County Council Leader and the Chair of the [Norfolk Strategic Flood Alliance \(NSFA\)](#), met with MPs to explain the risks Norfolk faces and how those risks could be addressed promoting these key points:

- Push for legislative permission to build reservoirs designed to capture excess water in times of flood, for use in times of drought
- Advocate for Property Flood Protection measures to be granted directly to the Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA) for faster allocation for those who need it
- Reduce bureaucracy by granting greater autonomy in funding allocation for surface water flood mitigation schemes
- Combine enforcement and maintenance powers and responsibilities for LLFA's
- Support the creation of a dedicated Minister for the Coast

Children and Young People: Post-16 Travel Scheme Consultation

Norfolk County Council has launched a public consultation as part of its annual review of its Post-16 Transport Policy Statement. The consultation focuses on the [Post-16 Travel Scheme](#) that offers subsidised travel for eligible students aged between 16-18 years old, as well as 16-25 year olds with Special Education Needs and Disabilities, to get to a school sixth form, sixth form college or further education learning establishment.

The council spent £3.8m on its Post-16 Travel Scheme in 2022-23, providing travel assistance to 1,320 students across Norfolk. To reflect the current and forecasted level of inflation for the next year, consideration is being given to increasing the parental contribution for the Post-16 Travel Scheme. It's usually increased each year in-line with inflation.

In the consultation two options are outlined for increasing parental contributions for post-16 travel. The 3% option is based on current inflation levels and the 6% option is based on the council's inflationary forecast for 2024-25. The 6% figure more likely represents the cost uplift that the council will face in the coming year.

The council does not have to provide free or subsidised post-16 travel assistance but does have to prepare and publish an annual transport policy statement, specifying arrangements for provision of transport or other assistance that the authority considers necessary to facilitate the attendance of all persons of sixth form age receiving education or training.

The post Post-16 Transport Policy is reviewed annually to make sure it offers the best value for money and meets the needs of local families and young people, while remaining financially sustainable.

Findings from the consultation will be used as part of the evidence to inform a decision about the proposals. If approved, this change will be implemented from September 2024.

The consultation closes on 27 February 2024 and is available [here](#).

Norfolk Museums

Ancient House, Museum of Thetford, has been awarded a National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) grant of £198,059, in the museum's centenary year.. The funding will be used to celebrate its centenary and tell the story of its benefactors, the Duleep Singh family.

Other funding for the two-year project has come from the Thetford Town Council community grant, the Friends of Thetford Museum, Norfolk County Council and Arts Council England as part of the Norfolk Museum Service's National Portfolio Organisation grant.

Digifest at Norfolk libraries

Digifest, which aims to inspire the next generation of coders and creators, is back for 2024.

Digifest forms part of Norfolk County Council's Digital Inclusion Strategy. It helps children and young people with the use of creative digital technologies, aiming to inspire them to pursue a future career in a digital industry.

Throughout February, there will be a huge variety of free events and workshops taking place across Norfolk's libraries for CYP aged four to 14. They are being encouraged to try

their hand at stop-motion animation, learn basic coding skills with different robots, create with 3D pens and more.

Norfolk libraries also offer a wide range of digital support and initiatives such as laptops for loan, access to digital resources, and a team of digital champions to help people to improve computer skills.

More information about events taking place across Norfolk's libraries throughout Digifest is available [here](#).

National Apprenticeship Week

National Apprenticeship Week took place from 5 to 11 February - the 17th annual celebration of apprenticeships. This year's theme was Skills for Life.

With over 400 apprentices, Norfolk County Council advocated the benefits that apprenticeships can bring to individuals, teams and services.

More information about apprenticeships in Norfolk, including how to find an apprenticeship in Norfolk and how to employ an apprentice in Norfolk is available on the County Council webpages [here](#).

New Film Office for Norfolk

Norfolk County Council has awarded a 2-year contract to manage a new Norfolk Film Office to the Norwich based company, Norfolk Screen.

The Norfolk Film Office will proactively promote Norfolk and its assets as a location for TV and film productions, as well as act as the front door for any location enquiries, to ensure our county capitalises on the growth of the UK TV and film sector.

The two-year pilot film office programme aims to generate an increase in economic activity for the county via an increase in filming activity, and to confirm the viability of a stand-alone Film Office.

The pilot project has been made possible thanks to support from all Norfolk's local authorities and together we hope to achieve great things for the benefit of the local economy, the local screen sector and associated bodies.

Location scouts searching for sites and new locations wishing to register with the film office are encouraged to [contact Norfolk Screen](#).

Norfolk and Waveney ICS – Careers Fair for Healthcare Science

Local school students and university students across Norfolk and Waveney are encouraged to attend a special event during Healthcare Science Week, to find out about careers in healthcare science this March showcasing a wide selection of healthcare science specialties.

Guidance on interview preparation will also be given to equip individuals with the right information and techniques on how they get into the NHS and progress within clinical and non-clinical job roles.

The event has been developed in partnership between NHS Norfolk and Waveney, Norfolk and Norwich University Hospital, James Paget University Hospital and The Queen Elizabeth Hospital in King's Lynn.

The event is open to all, but students are particularly encouraged to attend.

The event takes place on Tuesday 12 March 2024, 10am – 3pm at the Forum, Millennium Plain, Norwich, Norfolk, NR2 1TF.

Support for families

Families in Norfolk will benefit from a new practical service launched by Norfolk County Council and Home-Start Norfolk.

The County Council has awarded a one-year contract, starting in April 2024, to deliver a new volunteer peer support service to Home-Start Norfolk, as part of its innovative family hub programme.

The service will be accessible for families in Norfolk who are expecting a baby, or have a child up to the age of two-years-old, who require practical support to make sure they have the tools and resources they need to give their children the best start in life.

Home-Start Norfolk will recruit, train and support volunteers to connect and build relationships with individual families in the comfort of their own homes or local community venues.

The service will also include community-based groups and activities, supporting individuals to access wider social activities within their local area and accessing guided self-help resources. This will help to empower parents to have the capacity and confidence to ensure their child's needs are met, including help to discover and navigate their local community, access professional support and support identified needs.

The offer of peer support is being delivered as part [of Norfolk's Start for Life and Family Hub](#) approach, funded through the national Government Family Hubs and Start for Life Programme.

The approach supports Norfolk's vision for every child and young person to flourish by strengthening the prevention and early help offer for families with children up to age of 19, or 25 if they have special educational needs and disabilities.

Government updates

New dental recovery plan announced NHS dentistry services

The government's dental recovery plan sets out a national programme of actions for the recovery and reform of NHS dentistry services in England.

It aims to prevent poor oral health, boost access and activity, support and develop the whole dental workforce. The government says the plan could see up to 2.5 million additional NHS dental appointments delivered for patients over the next 12 months, including up to 1.5 million extra treatments being delivered.

The aim to increase dental training places has given fresh hope to calls to government, (backed by all Norfolk MP's) for an undergraduate dental school at the University of East Anglia to be established.

A link to the plan is available [here](#).

NHS Pharmacy First launched

As part of the NHS and government's primary care access recovery plan, patients in England will now be able to get treatment for seven common conditions at high street pharmacies without needing to see a GP, as part of a major transformation in the way the NHS delivers care.

Trained pharmacists will be able to assess and treat patients for sinusitis, sore throat, earache, infected insect bite, impetigo, shingles, and uncomplicated urinary tract infections in women (under the age of 65) without the need for a GP appointment or prescription.

The NHS said that 90% of community chemists have registered to provide the new service and it will free up around 10 million GP appointments a year.

Patients can access the new service by walking straight into a chemist or being referred by NHS 111, urgent treatment centres, emergency departments or their GP. Those who are not registered with a GP can still access the service.

The NHS will launch a national marketing campaign from mid-February 2024, which will encourage the public to access advice and treatment from community pharmacy services for common conditions and run for six weeks. They are developing a communications toolkit for ICBs to use to share information across their channels.

Government grant for state schools to purchase and install EV chargepoints

The government has publicised a grant for state-funded schools and education institutions to install electric vehicle charge point sockets at their site(s).

Paid for by the Department for Transport, the grant forms part of the Workplace Charging Scheme and is available for state-funded schools, colleges, nurseries and academies to boost the charge point facilities for staff and visitors. This could also help schools to generate revenue by making their chargepoints available to the public.

The grant can enable 75% off the cost to buy and install chargepoints. Successful applicants will receive a voucher that is valid for 180 days from the date of issue.

The closing date for applications is 31 March 2025.

Further details and how schools can apply are available [here](#).

Environment

The Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs have published updated guidance on biodiversity net gain (BNG) credits as they became mandatory on 12 February 2024.

BNG is an approach to development that aims to ensure that habitats for wildlife are left in a measurably better state than they were before the development.

Under the new rules, all major housing developments will be required to deliver at least a 10% benefit for nature eg If a woodland is destroyed by a road, another needs to be recreated . Developers must do a survey of habitat before development and use the statutory biodiversity metric to explore options. They must deliver the BNG and can do so either on-site or off-site, or as a last resort by buying statutory biodiversity credits.

DEFRA say they are committing £10.6m of new funding to help local planning authorities integrate BNG, eg to help recruit and expand ecologist teams.

Whilst the new guidance is positive for protecting natural assets, there is an increasing potential clash of local priorities for housebuilding and growth with those of protecting nature, wildlife, and green space.

The government has also said that BNG will be implemented for small sites development from 2 April 2024 and for nationally significant infrastructure projects from late 2025.

Further details about BNG and a link to the government's latest guidance available [here](#).

National Campaign to fight fraud launched

The Home Office has launched a major campaign to transform the fight against fraudsters. Stop! Think Fraud, launched on 12 February 2024 is backed by leading counter fraud experts who are uniting under one voice to provide consistent, clear and robust anti-fraud advice to the public.

Fraud accounts for around 40% of all crime in England and Wales, with an estimated 3.2 million offences each year. The latest data from the Crime Survey of England and Wales shows it has reduced by 13% over the past year. The estimated cost of fraud to society is £6.8 billion in England and Wales.

Adverts will be prominently displayed in public settings, from billboards to radio, and from TV screens to social media. It is anticipated the campaign will be seen by 95% of adults in the UK from over the coming weeks.

The campaign also includes an online fraud hub that provides concise, simple to follow advice and signpost victims to relevant organisations for further advice and support.

Norfolk County Council Trading Standards also provide information and updates relating to the latest consumer scams, fraud alerts and how to report scams – more information available [here](#).

A link to the government's new online fraud hub is available [here](#).

Anti-social behaviour funding for police forces

On 15 February the Prime Minister announced that every police force in England will receive at least £1 million to ramp up patrols to tackle violence and disorder. The government funding will be targeted to areas where there is high prevalence of violence, anti-social behaviour, and illegal public drug consumption.

The funding is intended to enable each police force to deploy uniformed patrols in "hotspot" areas each year, to help drive down crime and boost public confidence in their local force.

A link to the government announcement is available [here](#)

Planning permission to be required for future short-term lets

The Government has announced that second-home owners will have to seek planning permission for future short-term lets, so people wanting to use their property as a short-let holiday home will have to get permission from their local council.

The new use category for homes will apply only to people wanting to rent out their home for more than 90 days in a year and will involve the creation of a mandatory national register to give councils more information about the activity in their area.

Further information available on the government website [here](#).

Extension of stay for Ukrainians in UK

From early 2025, all those in the UK under one of the Ukraine visa schemes will be able to apply to stay here for an additional 18 months and continue to have the same rights to access work, benefits, healthcare, and education throughout their stay. This will mean that those who came on the first visas under one of the Ukraine visa schemes could now stay in the UK until September 2026.

Further details available on the government website [here](#).