

COUNTY COUNCILLOR REPORT OCTOBER 2024

County Deal – devolution update

Following the Government's decision to halt the £600 million devolution deal that Norfolk County Council had agreed with the previous administration, county council leader Kay Mason Billig had a meeting with Local Government Minister Jim McMahon on 7 October on a new way forward.

Cllr Mason Billig said: "We had a very good and detailed meeting with the minister. We discussed issues which were pertinent to Norfolk, the challenges we face and our aspirations for the future. There was a general accord that we should look for ways to deliver devolution for the county.

"The Government will not allow our previously negotiated level three deal to go ahead and have expressed a preference for a more regional approach in East Anglia

"However, there is still the potential for a level two deal for Norfolk, which would give us the adult skills funding, whilst we continue to explore further routes to devolution.

"Norfolk County Council agreed at its last full council meeting to talk to the Government to ensure as many positive aspects of our previous ambitious deal could be recovered, and that Norfolk did not move to the back of the queue.

"With that in mind, we will continue to pursue devolution options which are in the best interests of our county and will be having ongoing discussions with the Minister about what the next steps could be."

The upshot is the process is ongoing and as soon as there is further information and something which can be agreed we will let everyone know.

Budget update

The pressures on local government budgets continue to grow and there is still 'substantial uncertainty' about local government funding.

Initial proposals were considered at a Cabinet meeting on 7 October although final decisions will not be made until February 2025.

Proposals that would go out to public consultation are:

- Raising council tax - with the following options: an increase of 3%, an increase of up to 5%, an increase of more than 5%.
- Review of Housing Related Support Services.
- Switch off a further 2% of Norfolk County Council maintained streetlights.

Norwich Park and ride update

Good news for Postwick Park & Ride as following a competitive tender process Norfolk County Council has awarded contracts to run all Norwich Park and Ride services for up to the next eight years, starting in early 2025.

Two operators have been successful, with First Bus having been awarded the contract to run services from the Airport and Thickthorn sites, and Central Connect (operating as Simonds) providing services from Harford and Postwick. First Bus has committed to running zero-emission buses from the Thickthorn and Airport sites. All four sites will see earlier and later journeys and a service on a Sunday.

The Sprowston site will continue to be part of the overall park and ride offer but offering a slightly different service as it will be opened up to local bus services to use as a transport hub on local routes.

Norfolk Recycling centres – changes due in November

Changes are being made at Norfolk recycling centres that will affect Norfolk residents and traders.

The changes will help with service demand, reduce congestion and make sites safer whilst ensuring costs are covered for the disposal of waste.

Anyone wishing to visit a Norfolk recycling centre from Monday 18 November 2024 must book in advance. Bookings can be made up to seven days ahead either online via the council's website or by phoning the customer service centre. The new booking system will be live from Monday 11 November.

Additionally, from 1 November trade customers will see a change to the way they pay to dispose of their waste. Businesses will be charged based on the size of vehicle and the type of waste they bring, instead of the number of bags.

School safety inspections update

Initial safety inspections of ceilings at 60 Norfolk schools have now been completed, with no further school or class closures needed.

Fifteen schools of the 60 inspected, require immediate work on parts of their ceilings and a small number of schools require follow-up checks where specialist equipment is needed to reach inaccessible areas.

All schools remain open and have appropriate measures in place to ensure a safe and effective learning environment for pupils.

Academies are responsible for their own maintenance programme and the council has written to trusts to notify them of this issue.

Increase in school places for SEND

As part of Norfolk County Council's Local First Inclusion (LFI) programme, 76 extra spaces have been created at Norfolk schools for children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). The places are being created in infant, junior and high schools across the county.

The schools are already home to a developing network of [Specialist Hubs of Inclusive Practice \(SHIPs\)](#), operating within existing Specialist Resource Bases (SRBs) in Norfolk mainstream schools. SHIPs provide children who have co-occurring special educational needs with an enhanced offer of support and a personalised, child-centred approach to learning and development.

The £100m LFI programme pledges to deliver hundreds of new specialist education places across Norfolk. It also aims to provide significantly more advice, support, and funding for mainstream schools to support inclusion with the 15 new school and community support teams that were introduced in September 2023, to give early help and support to both parents and schools.

The initiative contributes towards the [Flourish](#) ambition for Norfolk to be a county where all children and young people can flourish

Crowdfund Norfolk platform launched to attract donations for environmental projects

Grassroots and community-focused projects that aim to improve the environment will be supported through a donation-funding platform launched by Norfolk County Council in collaboration with Crowdfunder.

Using the power of the crowd, Crowdfund Norfolk will help environmental, sustainability and net zero projects to get the funding they need to turn their ideas into a reality.

Projects that match the criteria can seek donations from the community to reach their budget and will be eligible for 50% funding up to a maximum value of £10,000.

The innovative initiative was launched at the recent Norfolk Market Towns Conference that explored ways in which footfall can be increased across the county's 22 market towns.

Further information about Crowdfund Norfolk funding and how to apply is available on the crowdfunder site [here](#).

Norfolk Market Towns conference update

The recent conference to attract more visitors to Norfolk's market towns brought together more than 100 people from businesses and organisations across the county.

Swaffham Assembly Rooms was packed out for the event organised by Norfolk County Council and sponsored by Lovell, with representatives from 22 market towns in attendance to hear success stories celebrated and challenges explored.

Separate panel discussions explored sharing best practice on the regeneration and placemaking of Norfolk's market towns as well as opportunities for business and skills support.

Nourishing Norfolk

Nourishing Norfolk has recently been [cited as a good practice case study](#) by the NHS confederation.

The [Nourishing Norfolk programme](#) is a community-driven initiative that addresses food insecurity across Norfolk by establishing affordable food hubs that provide nutritious groceries and holistic support services, empowering local communities to lead and sustain their own development.

The initiative is run by the Norfolk Community Foundation, an independent local charity which is supported by Norfolk County Council and Norse.

Norfolk County Council web pages provide links to the Nourishing Norfolk hubs , as well as to a range of other resources across Norfolk that help with those struggling with living costs, including those struggling to afford and buy food. A link to the pages is available [here](#).