

Norfolk County Council Annual Report for Annual Parish Meeting

Many of the Services have been very busy over the last year.

Trading Standards

Trading Standards were so busy dealing with the outbreak of Avian Flu that other services sent people to assist them. There were 65 outbreaks identified across the county as opposed to 3 the previous year. It became mandatory to keep birds 50 or more birds inside but advisory to keep them all inside.

Trading Standards also continued its everyday work ensuring businesses are operating within the correct legislation and trying to protect local residents from rogue traders who email, telephone or knock on doors. They work in partnership with Citizen's Advice who provide a helpline to received information and give advice to local people. Tel: 0808 223 1133. They also provide a Trusted Trader directory of local organisations.

Eleven new No Cold Calling Zones were set up in 2022 taking the number to 308. These 308 act as a deterrent to bogus callers and help protect 14,474 households across the county.

Fire and Rescue Service

The Fire Service was very stretched at times during the year dealing with flooding and wildfires. Last summer they dealt with over 650 wildfires sometimes tackling 50 per day, over 6 times more than in 2021 when they dealt with 96. On July 19th the call centre received 808 fire calls and on July 24th 1672 so a major incident was called and ten engines from other services came in to assist. As well as field fires many houses were completely burnt out.

April 1st 2023 marks the 75th Anniversary of the creation of the current Fire Service. They will be having Open Days at some Stations and there will be an Emergency Village at the Royal Norfolk Show to show the work of the emergency services as well as a display from the Fire Museum.

The Council continues to work with the Norfolk Strategic Flooding Alliance and all of its partners to reduce inland and coastal flood risks by establishing a single phone number for all flood related issues and targeting support for those areas most at risk. Work will continue to encourage people to clear ditches to try to prevent the build up of water during heavy downpours. An advice leaflet has been produced.

Adult Learning

Adult Learning continues to offer hundreds of courses both online and face to face. They have just opened a new Construction Centre on Hellesdon Industrial site offering free courses for anyone over 19 years of age on bricklaying, carpentry, plastering, plumbing, and much more. A second centre is soon due to open in Kings Lynn. A temporary Construction Centre was set up at Wensum Lodge last year as they were keen to start delivering the course. Over 600 people attended the training and a third of them were female, this is far more than the one per cent of women in the construction industry. The courses are for people to learn new skills for employment but also for those who want to do their own DIY.

They have also been offering courses to people who have English as a second language. They worked with the Fire Service to ensure immigrants and refugees knew how to report a fire or other incident in this country and they are offering new Multiply training to help people with numeracy. These are to help businesses upskill their staff, improve peoples employment opportunities or help people to manage their money. Training is free and can be for individuals or groups.

Libraries

The libraries continue to be the font of all knowledge, helping people requiring information about services provided by all councils and other organisations as well as providing a warm space during the cold winter months and the opportunity to join in activities for all ages, including knit and natter, bounce and rhyme, and board games. They also provided free, Keep Warm and Go bags containing a hat, blanket, socks and a hot water bottle and Toiletry Bags containing shampoo, bodywash, soap, hand gel, toothbrush and toothpaste and deodorant as well as the usual Tricky Period sanitary packs.

The Summer Reading Challenge was a great success with around 9,000 children taking part. Children were presented with certificates and medals as a reward for completing the challenge.

There has been a Public Consultation on mobile libraries to review the routes and the demand in each village. Not many people use them and fuel costs keep rising so there will be some changes later in the year.

Museums

The Castle Museum is still hosting weddings and visits from groups of school children. The transformation of the Castle Keep to a replica of what it was like in Norman times is nearly complete. All five levels from basement to battlements will be accessible to everyone. There will also be new catering and toilet facilities.

The latest exhibition of artifacts from a shipwreck which sank near Great Yarmouth on May 6th 1682, called the Last Voyage of the Gloucester, has been very popular and attracted an above average number of visitors, over 500 people, on the first Saturday that it was open.

Carbon Emissions

The County Council has committed to achieve 'net zero' carbon emissions on our estates by 2030. All street lighting should be converted to energy efficient LEDs by 2024.

The proposal to plant one million trees in five years to help offset carbon emissions is continuing.

Trees are being grown at the Environmental Hub at Gressenhall Museum. To date 210,000 trees have been planted and there is also a Hedge Restoration Fund to help fill the gaps in hedgerows and join up habitats to provide corridors for wildlife to travel safely along.

The Council has received government funding to provide 70 electric, zero emission, buses and the Roundtree Way Depot will be one of the first two fully electric bus depots outside London. Also 16 local authorities, including Norfolk, are to receive government funding to help roll out thousands of electric vehicle charging points.

Housing

Repton Property Development, the County Council's housing development company has recently completed a site in Attleborough where all 48 properties are affordable homes.

Strategic Review

The Council has been undertaking a strategic review to try to find savings by 'doing things better for less'. The predicted £60 million gap has been covered although due to increasing demand for Adult and Children's Services we foresee a gap of about £46 million next year. It has been agreed to increase the precept by 2.99% for general Council Tax and by 2% for Adult Services Social Care in line with the governments suggested cap.

Children's Services

Children's Services has been dealing with a need for more school places over the coming years. The three new SEND schools providing 500 more specialist places have been built and have opened in Fakenham, Gt Yarmouth and Easton.

Childminders and Foster Carers have been caring for children for decades. The Council now has a New Roads scheme which is looking for people willing to offer lodgings and advice and support to young people aged 12 – 25 to help them develop independence and prepare for adult life.

Last year the Council supported children aged 5 – 16 as part of the government's Holiday Activities and food programme. The Big Norfolk Holiday Fun Scheme will be repeated again this summer and at Easter. The scheme is free for children eligible for free school meals, young carers, children who are refugees and disabled children.

The Council offers various training schemes including Social Work Apprenticeships and experience of working with both children and adults.

Highways

Work continues on plans for the Norwich Western Link and Highways England will soon be starting work on the A47 between North Tuddenham and Easton. There will probably be more rat running through the local country lanes and villages whilst the work is in progress. Highways are looking at ways of mitigating this.

The third River Crossing at Gt Yarmouth is nearing completion.

Highways Rangers have already started coming round the village to clean signs or help with small highways issues.

Devolution

The Council has been considering a County Deal with the Government which would bring in £600 million over thirty years, (£20million per year) plus the opportunity to apply for other funding and deliver more jobs, housing and investment. This would involve a directly elected leader and cabinet governance. A public consultation was held in March and the responses are being analysed. An agreement will be signed at the December Council Meeting if it is agreed to continue with this proposal.

Cllr. Margaret Dewsbury

Cabinet Member for Communities and Partnerships
Norfolk County Council: Hingham Division
South Norfolk Council: Easton Ward