

District Councillor Annual Report to Wicklewood

It gives me great pleasure to present my 2024/25 annual report from South Norfolk District Council.

Finance – Where does your money go?

South Norfolk Council delivers 86 diverse services and its budget for 2025/26 is:

- **Gross Cost:** £64,952,000
- **Income:** £43,666,000
- **Net Cost:** £21,286,000

The budget is funded through a combination of business rates, Council Tax, and government grants. The Council's demand on the Collection Fund for general expenditure is £9,466,975, and for special expenditure is £7,540.

Council Tax – The District Council has **raised its share of Council Tax by £5 per Band D property**, representing a consistent policy for several years now. Although the council remains committed to identifying structural savings that may allow for further freezes in the future.

South Norfolk Council has set the Council Tax for 2025/26 as follows:

- **Band D property:** £175.00 per year, an increase of £5 from the previous year.
- **Average Council Tax bill:** £2,367.89 per year for a Band D property, which also includes contributions to Norfolk County Council, Norfolk Police and Crime Commissioner, and Parish/Town Councils.

Here is a breakdown of the average Council Tax bill for a Band D property:

- **Norfolk County Council (excluding Adult Social Care Precept):** £1,494.09
- **Adult Social Care Precept to Norfolk County Council:** £261.54
- **Police and Crime Commissioner for Norfolk:** £329.85
- **South Norfolk Council:** £175.00
- **Parish/Town Council (average):** £107.27
- **Special Expenses (Street Lighting):** £0.14

Note – the average Parish Precept for this Ward is roughly half the District average.

Environment & Waste – The Government has mandated the rollout of food waste services from April 2026, to meet this deadline, South Norfolk is making significant investments into new fleet and depot infrastructure to support the new requirement. Concurrently, the Council has launched a new campaign focused on fly-tipping, which has achieved a high media profile; the 'WTF' campaign (Where's the Fly Tip). The campaign has the goal of both encouraging people to report incidents of fly-tipping, whilst also making perpetrators more aware of the risks of prosecution.

The Council also launched a **new grant for the upcoming year** for nature recovery, which organisations can bid for grants of up to £10k to support projects that meet the goals of carbon sequestration, promoting biodiversity, and enhancing public access. Examples could be mini-forests, new pathways, or restoring ponds. Please get in touch directly if you want help applying.

The Council has also indicated it's desire to identify one large scale project that meets the above requirements, and it actively exploring opportunities across South Norfolk.

Economic Development – The Council continues it's successful projects to promote Small and Medium Sized Businesses (SME), including its Rural Business Builder programme. In addition, it has helped to joint fund the initial stages of a new lab facility at the Norwich Research Park alongside the County Council and private contractors. More information will be forthcoming over the coming year.

Planning, Housebuilding and Energy Infrastructure – You will be aware that last year the Greater Norwich Local Plan was passed, protecting the five-year land supply in South Norfolk, the practical impact of this was to protect sites that had not been allocated for development from speculative planning applications. However, the government late last year made a number of changes to the planning system, and housing targets, which means this protection from speculative applications has now been lost. South Norfolk Council is currently exploring a range of options to tackle this, the most public of which has been the option to build a new town.

This is only one option, and to be clear, the advantages of it would be to avoid development of land in existing villages and towns where infrastructure is strained. A new town would allow us to focus development in one area, and ensure the correct infrastructure is installed from the start.

In parallel, South Norfolk is receiving vast amounts of interest for solar farm and energy infrastructure development. Whilst not opposing the development of renewable energy, the council feels these have to be channeled to the most appropriate sites, and that a strategic approach to their development needs to be taken. As such we will be publishing further guidance on this over the coming year and will continue to challenge the government on their approach.

Health and Leisure – Work continues on the new building for the Humbleyard practice in Hethersett, and we are hopeful of having workers on site early next year. Existing facilities in Cringleford and Mulbarton will remain, and the goal of the new development is to reduce pressure for doctors' appointments across all three villages. In January, the Council's renovated swimming pool in Diss re-opened, and work is now underway to create a new Community and Leisure Centre in Diss on the old John Grose site.

Local Grants – Sixteen projects received a share of £150,000 from the Community Action Fund. These included improvements to village halls, play areas and sporting facilities. I have contributed a £1000 from my Member's grant to support the restoration of a memorial at St George's.

Local Government Re-organisation and Devolution – In November the government invited applications for applicants to enter the new Devolution Priority Programme. The goal of this is to devolve new powers around infrastructure, adult skills, and economic development to a Mayoral body that will sit across Norfolk and Suffolk.

Concurrently, the government has asked Councils in Norfolk to submit proposals for re-organizing local government on a single tier basis (creating new authorities that have the powers of both District and County Council). It is anticipated these will come into effect in 2028, with elections to the 'shadow' bodies in 2027. No proposal for what this would look like has yet been agreed.

However, the other six district councils are supporting plans for a three unitary proposal, which would include a 'Greater Norwich'. South Norfolk is opposing any proposal that breaks the Norwich Travel to Work area, fearing it would be an non sensible economic geography, not have the tax base to deliver social services, and would leave communities on the edge of Norwich in an authority where their concerns would play second fiddle to the Urban Core. As such, South Norfolk is proposing an East-West Two Unitary model. The County Council is exploring options for both one and two unitaries.

Cllr Richard Elliott
Cabinet Member for Resources and Innovation
Member for Wicklewood Ward
April 2025