

Norfolk County Council Annual Report

Devolution and Local government Reform

One of the main discussions this year was Devolution – a government plan to put both Norfolk and Suffolk together under the control of a Mayor. A Mayor should have been elected this year, but it was deferred until 2028.

The other main topic has been Local government Reform. The County and District Councils were asked to submit their preferences regarding the number of Unitaries that should cover Norfolk. Six Districts preferred three unitaries, one preferred two and the County Council preferred one. The government has decided that both Norfolk and Suffolk should be made up of three Unitary Councils. The election for members of these will be held next year.

Services

NCC provides 87 different services, but I will only update on the main ones and things that may be of interest.

Budget

NCC delivered a balanced budget in 2025-26 and has approved a balanced budget for 2026-27. This included identifying £42.3 million in savings and efficiencies and committing £76.3 million to protect vital services such as Adults and Children's Services.

Children's Services

Our Children's Services is one of the best in the country. It was considered Good by the last Ofsted Inspection. It has recently been inspected and was considered to be even better, but the result will not be announced until May. They have about 1,000 children in care but still need some more Foster Carers as an average of five children come into care each week.

The Service transports 18,600 children to school every day which is quite expensive. To reduce costs the Service is gradually providing new Special Schools or extensions to current schools to reduce the amount of time children have to spend travelling. The Government is providing funding for two new SEND schools in Gt Yarmouth and Downham Market.

The Holiday Fund which provides free holiday activities such as sport, swimming, arts and crafts and outdoor activities also free meals for children and young people, who are eligible for benefits such as free school meals, was very successful and will continue this year.

Adult Services

The demand for Adult Services continues to increase as we have an increasingly ageing population in Norfolk. They are currently increasing the number of independent living facilities as people prefer this to going into a home.

Adult Learning Service

Adult Learning and Skills plays a vital role in addressing skills gaps by providing a variety of training for employment of hobbies using community venues, including libraries, as well as courses on line. They also have a Construction Centre in Norwich where people can learn skills for new employment or to do their own DIY work.

Public Health

NCC's Public Health Department launched a new campaign to encourage residents aged 50 and over to prioritise their health. A new website called 'It's never too late' was launched to highlight ways that local residents could improve their health and wellbeing.

5G Coverage

Over the years £8 million has been invested in 5G coverage which now supports communication for over 90% of Norfolk.

Heating Oil fund

Due to escalating issues NCC has set up a new Norfolk Heating Oil Fund to support low-income households who rely on heating oil and are at risk of losing access to heating and hot water due to sharply increasing prices and demand.

Highways

Last year the Council appointed Kier as its long-term contractor responsible for the maintenance and construction of our highway network of over 6,000 miles of roads as well as pedestrian and cycle paths. We believe the Government Grant for Highways Maintenance will gradually increase from £56 million in 2025/26 to £83 million by 2029/30.

Last year 58 new gritters with automated salting, completed 66 runs and used 14,800 tonnes of salt. Each three-hour, gritting run treats 2.200 miles of roads. There are 2000 grit bins located across the county that local people can use on the roads.

They also have pothole machines to deal with the never ending, number of potholes caused by the extra wet weather and heavy vehicles. Over the last year 320 miles of roads were part of a road surface dressing programme which seals roads to help prevent potholes forming.

Parish Partnership Scheme

The Parish Partnership Scheme enables NCC and Parish Councils to fund local projects on a 50/50 basis. Proposals have to be submitted by December for projects proposed for the following year. In December it was agreed to contribute £384,517 to 99 projects which include new trods, signage, benches, village gateways, speed signs and access improvements.

Local Member Highway Fund

Each year since 2017 Councillors have had a Highways Grant that they can use to support a wide range of local highways schemes and projects.

Grants for Community Projects

Last year NCC launched a new Norfolk Community Fund, enabling each of the 84 councillors to allocate £5,000 in their Divisions to support local projects. Projects were also given the opportunity to join the NCC Crowdfunder to attract further donations.

Norwich Western Link

Following a year of much discussion as to whether the proposed Norwich Western Link will be funded, the Department for Transport has said it will remain in their Major Road Network programme and nearly £1 million will be released to NCC to continue preparing for it.

Fire Service

The Fire Service has purchased some new equipment this year to enable them to deal with wild fires as well as boats to help with flooding and water-based emergencies as we have two hundred miles of inland waterways in the county. All of the fire appliances, and operational officers, have also been provided with a body worn camera for use at incidents. They include location data and two-way communication with the control room to enable quicker, better informed, decision making during complex incidents.

Trading Standards.

Trading standards have also provided its officers with body worn camera for use during investigations.

Trading Standards have been working closely with the Police, businesses and community groups to help keep people aware of SCAMs as well as their work warning people about Bird Flu and other issues re protecting wild life.

Recycling

People are getting used to booking a time slot to visit the recycling centres. Over 87% of people surveyed said it met their requirements and they were pleased not to have to join long queues to use their local centre.

The Household Hazardous Waste Days were appreciated last year and will be continued this year. The dates have recently been publicised.

Wymondham Recycling Centre will soon be moved to a new larger site adjacent to the A11 between Wymondham and Attleborough.

Environment

NCC has not yet met its aim to plant one million trees to support the environment and tackle climate change but so far 850,00 trees have been planted.

Business Support

Business Support has been working with villages to try to improve the footfall in our High Streets and their High Streets Matter campaign has already helped 23 towns by providing local businesses with advice, training and grants. Their Hospitality Matters campaign has been supporting independent businesses such as pubs, cafes, restaurants and hotels to help improve their resilience and profitability by providing training and grants.

Norwich Castle

The National Lottery Heritage Fund contributed £13 million to redeveloping the castle including showing how the Keep would have looked when King Henry visited in 1121. Many other areas have been refurbished including installing a lift to enable everybody, including wheelchair users, to access all floors from basement to the battlements where they can enjoy views across Norwich.

The other museums have also provided new displays and events which people enjoyed during the year.

Libraries

The libraries are gradually being refurbished. The larger new libraries in Gt Yarmouth and Kings Lynn have been a great success with visits to Gt Yarmouth increasing from 1,041 to 5,325 in the first week of opening and Kings Lynn increasing from 905 to 6,326 visits in the first week of opening.

Libraries provide a wide range of services, as well as books, eg. activities for all ages from Bounce and Rhyme, to animation, coding and robotics and Knit and Natter. They provide information on council services, e-books and audio as well as computers and laptops to use, with staff support if necessary.

Last year more than 500 children took part in the DigiFest and the children's Summer Reading scheme for 4 – 11 year olds had an increase of 10% more children getting involved. The theme was Nature and the Great Outdoors.

This year is the National Year of Reading so there will be a range of provision for all ages as we know reading can reduce feelings of loneliness and social isolation.

This is just a small selection of the work that has gone on during the year.

Cllr. Margaret Dewsbury

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