

Norfolk County Council updates

Council agrees budget

Councillors have backed a £528m budget that 'delivers for Norfolk', in the face of the major cost, demand and funding challenges facing local government.

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 proposed 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). This would increase the Council's share of band D bills to £1,672.11. A 4.99% rise would generate £24.9m.

A small number of the 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. More details below.

Consultations on Savings Proposals

The Council has launched public consultations on savings proposals to help meet a £41.5 million budget shortfall.

The Council faces difficult decisions to deliver on its ambitions for the people of Norfolk against a difficult economic climate and more than a decade of reduced funding. The proposals will help us to balance our budget so that we can continue to deliver critical services and protect and support the most vulnerable people in Norfolk.

First set of proposals

Three Community & Environmental Services (CES) consultations launched on 15 February and run until midnight on 22 March 2024.

The three CES proposals are:

- 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.

The CES consultation surveys are available via the link below.

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

Second set of proposals

Two Adult Social Care (ASC) consultations launched on 19 February and run until midnight on 17 May 2024.

The two ASC proposals are:

- 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.

The ASC 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/>

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.

Many families need a little extra support during pregnancy and in the early years of their child's development, including practical support such as with understanding which crib or cot to purchase within their budget. Peer support volunteers can help families feel less isolated and to develop networks in their local communities.

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.

Improved bus and rail links to be delivered in Great Yarmouth

A new project will get underway in Great Yarmouth in March to improve connections between the rail station and local bus services as part of Norfolk County Council's Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP).

The work is due to start from 4 March and will see a new bus stop lay-by with a shelter and real time passenger information constructed on the eastern (southbound) side of A149 Acle New Road between the station access road and the Vauxhall roundabout. There will also be pavement widening to create a new section of foot/cycleway, and real-time passenger information installed within the rail station to direct people to the improved bus services.

Accessibility improvements will be carried out to the existing bus stop on the opposing carriageway (northbound) side of A149 Acle New Road between the station access road and Fuller's Hill roundabout.

Works are expected to last for up to 11 weeks with a lane closure in place on the outbound side of the Acle New Road for the duration of works but all traffic management will be removed during the Easter holidays and May Day weekend.

This project is part of a series of improvements aimed at improving bus journey times and reliability of services across the public transport network.

Full details, including a public information notice with details of traffic management for the work, are available [here](#).

All improvements under the Norfolk's Bus Service Improvement Plan so far, including those in Great Yarmouth, can be viewed via the [Travel Norfolk](#) website.

Government updates

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.

The government hopes this will help to keep more homes available to be lived in by local people.

Further details are expected in the coming weeks, ahead of changes being brought in from this summer.

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

Blueprint for the future of the railways - draft Rail Reform Bill

Ministers have put forward a plan for the future of the railways in a draft Bill for pre-legislative scrutiny.

The government says that the [draft Rail Reform Bill](#) sets in motion a plan to deliver a bold vision for future rail customers – of punctual and reliable services, simpler tickets and a modern and innovative railway that meets the needs of passengers and freight users.

Along with the draft Rail Reform Bill, the [government's response to the public consultation on its Plan for Rail](#) was also published on 20 February 2024.

The draft Bill would see the creation of Great British Railways (GBR) to bring together responsibility for both rail infrastructure and rail service, make future decisions on franchising and act as the single point of accountability for performance. It would also be tasked with driving forward the UK's rail freight sector, where the government recently set an ambitious target of 75% growth by 2050.

The formation of GBR was previously proposed in a White Paper, named the Williams-Shapps Plan for Rail, in May 2021.

It is considered unlikely that the proposed rail reform bill will make it on to the statute books before the next general election.

Government extends 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](#).

If I can be of any further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Kind regards

james