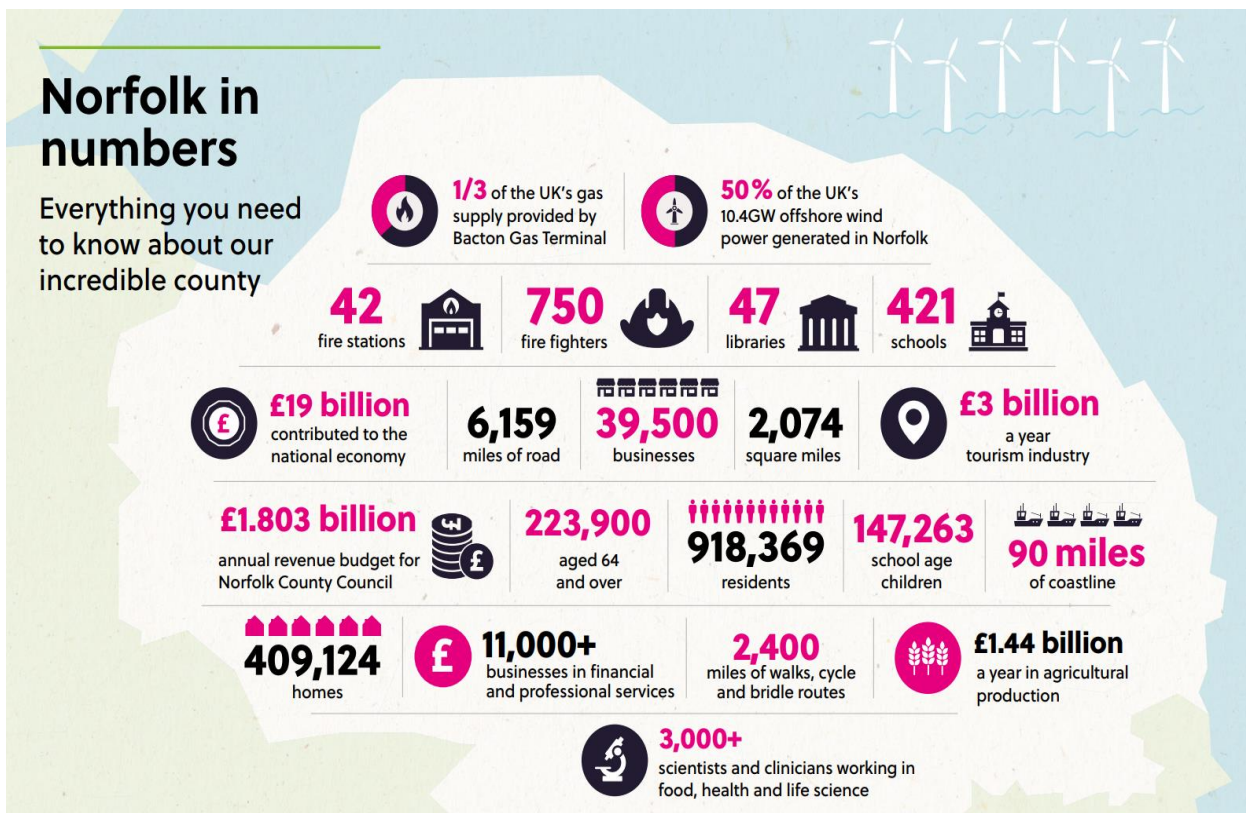


## COUNTY COUNCILLOR ANNUAL REPORT 2024

- 97.4% of highways inspections completed within timescale
- 96.8% of 'Priority A' defects (classified as dangerous/emergency) were fixed within the Transport Asset Management Plan timescales
- 95% Customer satisfaction (with Council Services)
- 96% of Looked after Children with an up-to-date Personal Education Plan
- Completed over 90,000 Adult Social Care Assessments for over 26,000 people



## **Highlights of the council's performance over the last year include:**

- Agreeing a £600 million-plus devolution deal to bring powers and funding from Westminster to Norfolk
- Spending £1.5 million per day on adult social care, including help for 11,000 people to return home from hospital.
- Securing £49.5 million of Government funding to improve bus services, with an 18 per cent rise in passenger numbers.
- Delivering ultra-fast broadband to more than 6,900 premises, with superfast broadband now covering 97.3 per cent of properties.
- Serving more than 1.8 million library customers.

## **Key priorities for the forthcoming year include:**

- Delivering the devolution deal and an economic strategy for Norfolk, to boost jobs and skills
- Delivering better quality, local and affordable care for children, including more foster carers
- Continuing to deliver supported living housing programmes for adults
- Delivering library hubs, including a range of services, in King's Lynn and Great Yarmouth
- Completing the roll-out of LED streetlighting, to cut costs and carbon emissions

## **Net budget of £528m for 2024-25**

Local government still has considerable financial challenges to face. The 2023-24 budget is projected to come in without any shortfall and the budget for 2024-25 is an increase in spend.

The key headlines are:

- £122m of investment to meet demand and cost pressures - 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 generating £24.9m additional income.
- 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.

## **£600 million devolution deal still on track**

Government funding will start transferring to Norfolk in 2025, if councillors vote in July 2024 to stage the first election for a leader in May 2025. The deal will mean that decisions can be taken in Norfolk, for Norfolk.

Through the County Deal Norfolk has a major opportunity to gain new powers and funding from the Government. This would be through an investment fund of £600m over 30 years,

transfer of the Adult Education budget (c£12m) together with other funds to invest in transport, skills and job opportunities, housing and regeneration, tailored to the needs of local people. This will open the door to further powers and funding in the future.

### **Household Support Fund**

This has been operating for 3 years and was due to conclude on 31 March 2024 using funding from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). The Chancellor of the Exchequer announced in the Budget that this funding would be extended by a further six months. The council has received £13.4m from central government and added an additional £400,000 to make the total programme of support worth £13.8m. It is working closely with district, borough, and city councils, VCSE and public sector partners to identify and implement a range of support measures to meet the needs of vulnerable households.

### **New £4.51m funding for roads and footpaths**

More roads and footpaths across the County will be repaired by Norfolk County Council during this coming year as part of additional Government funding.

Roads from Great Yarmouth to King's Lynn, from Hunstanton to Thetford and many in between will receive reclamite spray or resurfacing along with footpath construction to ensure Norfolk's infrastructure can best help people to get to work, travel to services and access Norfolk's natural and cultural assets through effective highways maintenance. This is in addition to the Council's highways asset management and maintenance programme.

### **Twenty-seven brand new gritters joined Norfolk's fleet**

Twenty-seven brand new gritters took to the roads for the first time this winter in a £3,238,000 boost to the annual push to help keep Norfolk moving safely during the winter months.

Norfolk's fleet of 58 winter vehicles treat 2,200 miles of roads on each full 3-hour gritting run. All A and B-class roads and some C-class roads are treated with a focus on commuter and major bus routes and as far as is possible one route into all villages. The A11 and A47 are gritted by National Highways.

In addition to the 49 gritting routes, a number of pedestrian areas and main pavements are treated in the centre of Norwich, Great Yarmouth and King's Lynn, and more than 2000 grit bins are available around the county for people to use on roads, pavements and cycle paths.

### **Norfolk flood protection**

The threat posed by flooding and coastal erosion in Norfolk has been laid out starkly for MPs as the council took their case for change to the heart of Westminster.

The delegation from Norfolk, led by Norfolk County Council Leader Cllr Kay Mason Billig and the Chair of the Norfolk Strategic Flood Alliance (NSFA), Henry Cator, met with MPs, on the 71st anniversary of the 1953 North Sea Flood, to explain the risks Norfolk faces and how those risks could be addressed.

As demonstrated over this winter, our county faces regular risks of flooding, with Norfolk ranked tenth most at risk of surface water flooding out of 149 local authority areas. In

addition, the county's position on the North Sea exposes it to tidal threats as well as significant coastal erosion: without action, it's estimated that in North Norfolk alone approximately 1,030 residential and commercial properties could be lost to erosion by 2100. That number could be up to 10,000 in all of Norfolk.

The key elements presented were:

- Push for legislative permission to build reservoirs designed to capture excess water in times of flood, for use in times of drought
- Advocate for Property Flood Protection measures to be granted directly to the Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA) for faster allocation for those who need it
- Reduce bureaucracy by granting greater autonomy in funding allocation for surface water flood mitigation schemes
- Combine enforcement and maintenance powers and responsibilities for LLFA's
- Support the creation of a dedicated Minister for the Coast

### **£1 million boost for Highway Parish Partnership Schemes**

Schemes totalling over £1m will be co-funded across Norfolk to deliver the wants and needs of local parishes and residents as part of the Highway Parish Partnership. with the County Council funding up to 50% of bid costs.

A County Council contribution of £467,884 and a Safety Camera Partnership contribution of £43,760 along with funding from Town and Parish Councils, will enable a programme of local works totalling £1,040,586 to be delivered in 2024-25.

### **More people 'choose the bus' in Norfolk**

It's been just over a year since Norfolk County Council received £49.55m of funding from the Department for Transport (DfT) to improve bus services across the county, the 6<sup>th</sup> highest in the country. There have been huge numbers of improvements already made across the county, and the latest figures show that passenger numbers have increased throughout the year with the number of fare-paying passengers now exceeding pre-covid levels.

Latest figures for Norfolk show that overall bus passenger numbers have increased by 18% in the last year with the number of fare-paying passengers now at 107% compared to pre-pandemic baseline figures. Norfolk is bucking the trend as nationally bus usage figures are at between 89% to 98% of pre-pandemic levels\*.

Concessionary pass holders, who have been the slowest to return to using the bus since the pandemic, are now at 83% of pre-pandemic.

The funding is being used to providing new or expanded bus routes, increased service frequencies on key routes, including more evening and weekend services.

In addition to the service enhancements year there have also been infrastructure improvements including the first Travel Norfolk Travel Hub in North Walsham and improved waiting areas with real-time information.

Bus travel has also become cheaper this year and offers great value for money thanks not only to the Government fare cap which most operators in Norfolk have signed up to but also 4 local fares offers delivered thanks to the bus service improvement plan:

- £1.50 flat fares for King's Lynn
- £1.50 flat fares for Thetford
- 25% off group, weekly and monthly tickets
- Reduced park & ride fares

### **24/7 free travel to all disabled bus pass holders in Norfolk**

From 1 February 2024 all Norfolk residents who hold a disabled concessionary travel pass have been eligible for free bus travel 24 hours a day, seven days a week when travelling within the county, meaning that more than 14,500 people across the county who hold a concessionary bus pass due to disability, and their eligible companions, will now be able to travel on any bus at any time free of charge across Norfolk.

Offering free travel at all times is over and above the minimum requirement set by government, and is something that a local authority can choose to do but doesn't have to do. The change was recommended following an updated equality impact assessment of the scheme which concluded that it is now unfair to offer a discretionary enhancement to just one group of disabled people (i.e. those who are blind or visually impaired).

### **Free DIY waste disposal for small projects**

Norfolk residents have been able to dispose of small amounts of DIY waste at Norfolk's Recycling Centres free of charge from 31<sup>st</sup> December following changes made by Norfolk County Council after Government abolished charges for the disposal of limited amounts and types of DIY waste at recycling centres across the UK.

The change applies to small-scale projects carried out by householders on their own home, allowing them to bring a maximum 100 litres (must fit into 2 x 50l bags) for free or one single item (maximum size of 200cm x 70cm x 75cm). Each household is allowed four free visits with DIY waste every four weeks. Anything beyond this will still be charged at normal rates.

### **Climate Strategy launched**

Norfolk County Council's Climate Strategy was launched at Gressenhall Farm and Workhouse Museum with special guest Kate Strong, world record holder and endurance cyclist.

The Climate Strategy sets out how the council will work not only to reduce its own carbon emissions, but to drive down emissions across the county, protect the unique environment of Norfolk, and to seize the opportunities the move to a green economy represents, securing investment and growth for Norfolk.

Key proposals include:

- Supporting active and sustainable transport, including further bus improvements and electric vehicle charging

- Providing space for nature and developing a nature recovery strategy
- Retrofitting council buildings to take out gas and oil heating and improve insulation – and encouraging businesses, residents and other organisations to do the same
- Reducing emissions from the council's companies, such as Norse
- Developing the green economy, with support for green skills, sustainable tourism and businesses
- The development of a nature recovery strategy to protect our natural assets and encourage greater biodiversity
- Working with the Tyndall Centre for climate change research at the University of East Anglia, to understand climate change impacts and how Norfolk might adapt to them
- Close collaboration between public sector, business, community and voluntary groups

### **Norfolk County Council environmental credentials praised in review**

Norfolk County Council is doing better than almost every other county council in the country at moving towards net zero, according to an independent assessment.

Campaign group Climate Emergency UK produced scorecards marking action by councils on climate change, including areas such as buildings, transport, planning and biodiversity.

Norfolk was placed joint second with Devon among county councils, with only Oxfordshire ranked higher, after a nine-month assessment process.

### **Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service**

The efforts of fire fighters, fire staff, their friends and families and community partners and volunteers, showing how everyone has a unique part to play in to make in making the service great were recognised at the Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service Annual Staff Awards.

Achievements including saving a village from the clutches of wildfire, helping transport a horse mannequin called Brandy, and restoring a fire station flower garden.

### **Adult Learning service rated 'Good' by Ofsted**

Norfolk County Council's Adult Learning has been rated as 'Good' following their latest Ofsted inspection.

The inspection report praised the ambition of the service, which provides community-based and online learning for around 6,000 adults a year. The service achieved a 'Good' rating across all six areas that were inspected, alongside the overall 'Good' rating.

Inspectors commented that learners are 'highly motivated' and committed to their studies. They praised the number of people who have a 'clear plan' for their future careers and that they want to improve their economic prospects.

In particular, inspectors highlighted the work with residents of retirement homes who have increased their confidence, self-care and resilience after completing courses in basic cookery. They commented how, following the course, learners felt less isolated and 'excited to prepare and eat their own meals'.

It was also recognised that the service has responded effectively to the growing demand for English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) courses.

There was praise for the work with Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service apprentices. The inspectors saw how the course helps them to work safely while learning about the importance of health and nutrition. The report concluded that the 'apprenticeship is well matched to the needs of the fire service.'

This inspection result comes on the back of Norfolk County Council Adult Learning being named 'Further or Higher Education Provider of the Year' at this year's Norfolk Education Awards.

### **More than ten thousand Norfolk children benefit from mental health programme in first year**

A children's mental health and wellbeing programme, funded by Norfolk County Council, has supported more than 10,000 in its first year.

The Rise Up programme gives children and young people valuable knowledge and strategies to support their mental health and is being delivered in secondary and special schools across the county. 93% of young people said that their ability to manage their wellbeing improved after completing the programme.

Created and delivered by Future Action, in partnership with Norfolk County Council's Virtual School for Children in Care, Previously in Care and Children with a Social Worker, the course aims to help children build confidence, reduce their anxiety, and create a sustainable wellbeing programme within 90 days.

### **Increase in the number of school preferences a parent can make from 3 to 4**

Following a review of the admission process for September 2023 and the difficulties some parents experienced with not being offered a place at one of their preferred schools, the current admission arrangements have been reviewed and consulted on to see an increase of the number of preferences from 3 to 4 to help improve admission decisions for families.

The School Admissions Code states that parents must be able to express a preference for at least 3 schools and requires admission authorities to consult on changes for six weeks between 1 October and 31 January where changes are proposed. The consultation run by the Local Authority opened on 31 October and closed 15 December 2023. Only one completed response was received, and the respondent supported the proposal.

### **New Norfolk Rural Business Awards**

Norfolk County Council and the Royal Norfolk Agricultural Association have joined forces to launch the new Norfolk Rural Business Awards.

The awards were announced at the recent annual Norfolk Farming Conference and are designed to recognise the essential nature and huge importance of Norfolk's rural communities and businesses to the region. They will highlight the very best of Norfolk from nine sponsored category areas aimed at showcasing a wide range of Norfolk's businesses, community groups and people.

Agriculture, forestry and fishing is the fourth largest sector in Norfolk, accounting for an estimated 8pc of all businesses - with many other businesses closely linked to the sector including those in accommodation, retail, food science, technology and engineering.

The award categories are: Best Rural Community Initiative; Best Farming Innovation Adopter; Best Food Producer; Norfolk's Unsung Hero; Best Drink Maker; Best Farming Champion; Best Emerging Talent; Best High Growth Business; Best Sustainable Land Use / Farming Exemplar.

Winners will receive a trophy, a certificate, and be able to use Norfolk Rural Awards branding in their promotions. They will be announced at the the Royal Norfolk Show in June.

Judging will include a visit to all shortlisted businesses, and each finalist will be asked to participate in a short film.

### **New Film Office for Norfolk**

Norfolk County Council has awarded a 2-year contract to manage a new Norfolk Film Office to the Norwich based company, Norfolk Screen.

The Norfolk Film Office will proactively promote Norfolk and its assets as a location for TV and film productions, as well as act as the front door for any location enquiries, to ensure our county capitalises on the growth of the UK TV and film sector.

The two-year pilot film office programme aims to generate an increase in economic activity for the county via an increase in filming activity, and to confirm the viability of a stand-alone Film Office.

The pilot project has been made possible thanks to support from all Norfolk's local authorities and together we hope to achieve great things for the benefit of the local economy, the local screen sector and associated bodies.

Location scouts searching for sites and new locations wishing to register with the film office are encouraged to [contact Norfolk Screen](#).

### **Norwich Western Link update**

It was agreed that this major infrastructure project for Norfolk progresses to crucial next steps in its development including submitting a planning application.

It is now expected that initial works will start in late 2025, with the start of the main construction works in summer 2026, and the road open for use in 2029.

The revised budget for the project is now £273.9m, an increase of £22.8m from the previous budget agreed in July 2022. However, the Department for Transport have indicated that they could provide funding of up to 100% of the costs set out at the OBC stage, which stood at £251.1m, although this has not yet been finalised. If the government provided £251.1m of funding, the local contribution required towards the overall cost of the project would be £22.8m which is less than previously anticipated - even with the overall budget increase.

Recent guidance from Natural England about protecting barbastelle bats has now raised doubts about getting a licence from them to do some of the work. This is a new development so further more definite information is still awaited.

### **Herring Bridge open**

Initially known as the Great Yarmouth Third River Crossing, Herring Bridge in Great Yarmouth came into operation for river traffic from 7am on Monday 27 November 2023.



This was a major infrastructure project delivered by Norfolk County Council with government funding.

### **West Winch Housing Access Road**

The West Winch Housing Access Road will serve the West Winch Growth area which will see up to 4,000 new homes built over the next 20 years. The proposed route connects the A10 to the A47 along a new 1.5-mile road. The road would join the A47 via a new roundabout and the A47 would be dualled between Hardwick and the new road.

The County Council recently submitted their latest business case to government which would see a significant proportion of the £84.47m project costs met by the Department for Transport. The project has been assessed as 'high value for money' according to the Department for Transport's criteria. Developers will contribute £14.6m towards the cost of the road which is set out in the [Strategic Infrastructure Delivery Plan](#).

### **New homes in Hopton by Repton Property Developments**

The first tenants have moved into the 200 home Bowlers Green development in Hopton-on-Sea, which was created by the county council's property company, Repton Property Developments in partnership with Lovell Homes.

This has come from the partnership between Repton, Lovell and Flagship to provide more affordable and high quality homes in Hopton complementing the almost completed scheme at Acle.

Flagship has purchased 60 of the 200 homes, for rent or shared ownership. So far, 23 of the 60 homes have been completed and the remainder should be completed next year.

### **Broadband boost for rural homes and businesses in Norfolk**

Homes and businesses in southern and eastern parts of England, including Norfolk, are set to benefit from new lightning-fast broadband connections backed by almost £320 million of UK government investment.

Around 62,000 homes and businesses in Norfolk stand to benefit from £114 million of this Project Gigabit investment, across locations including Buxton, Castle Acre and Horning. CityFibre, the UK's largest independent full-fibre provider, will deliver the gigabit-capable infrastructure.

CityFibre have also committed to providing internship opportunities for local people, with all interns to be offered long-term employment in the supply chain. They say that this commitment to skills and training in Norfolk will be bolstered by the creation of 40 18-month apprenticeship opportunities as well as work experience placements for local students undertaking Construction and Digital T-levels.