

County Councillor Ed Connolly, Spring report for Parishes 2023

Norfolk County Council Budget for 2023/24 approved by councillors

Norfolk County Council has set its latest budget, which tackles spending pressures and protects key services.

The budget approved today includes:

- A net spending increase of £29.6m to meet rising costs
- A Council Tax increase in line with the Government's cap of 4.99 per cent – 2.99 per cent for general Council Tax and two per cent for the adult social care precept. This would increase the County Council's share of band D bills from £1,516.95 to £1,592.64.
- A "significant proportion" of the £59.7m savings coming from "doing things better for less", including £17m from the first phase of a strategic review of the council

The proposed spending for each department is:

- Adult social services, £249.5m
- Children's services, £232.6m
- Community and environmental services, £177.1m
- Strategy and transformation, £12.8m
- Finance and commercial services, £35.8m

The same meeting will consider its £956.9m capital investment in buildings and equipment, funded by grants and property sales. In addition to a range of existing schemes, like the Great Yarmouth Third River Crossing and investment in special education needs (SEND) schools, there are new investments totalling £35m:

- County Farms refurbishment and carbon reduction schemes (£9.4m)
- The rolling Technology Improvement programme (£8.2m)
- Scottow Enterprise Park refurbishment (£8.6m)
- Estate Buildings Decarbonisation initiatives (£4m)
- Highways improvements (£2.5m)
- Fire and Rescue services equipment and site improvements (£1.2m)
- Expansion of waste recycling sites and services (£0.51m)
- One Million Trees for Norfolk (£0.5m)

Have your say on the county deal

A series of events have and are continuing to taking place so you can have your say on a £600 million-plus deal to unlock opportunities to deliver more jobs, housing and investment.

Consultation takes place until 20th March at www.norfolk.gov.uk/norfolkcountydeal on the in-principle county deal devolution agreement that Norfolk County Council signed with the Government last December.

£133m for highways and transport in Norfolk over the next year

Carbon-cutting transport schemes are set for a £29 million boost in Norfolk, despite the tough financial climate.

Norfolk County Council's Cabinet will be considering a forward looking and carbon-cutting transport budget for the new financial year at a meeting on Monday 6 March.

At £133m the 2023/24 highways and transport budget represents a £29m increase on the previous year's budget. Despite inflation being expected to dent the authority's spending power the highway and transport team have been focusing on maintaining and improving the network and continuing strong investment in carbon cutting transport strategies as the council moves towards net zero carbon by 2030.

Details of the location and cost of 120 walking, cycling, and road improvements across the county, and how £45.6m will be spent on maintenance of bridges, roads, drains and paths, are available in the papers for the meeting.

Cabinet will consider the report when it meets at 10am on Monday, 6 March.

£50m Bus Service Improvement Plan Funding for Norfolk

Norfolk County Council was only one of around 30 authorities who successfully received an allocation from the Bus Service Improvement Plan from government, received one of the largest allocations at £50m. The first £10m phase of this funding was received in November 2022. Through our Enhanced Partnership, we are now working closely with the Bus operators to implement enhanced routes and services as well as reviewing infrastructure and fares to encourage passenger growth and improved bus journey reliability. This should enable bus routes to be more sustainable in the long term. Following the receipt of the first payment, measures have already been implemented. which includes an increased frequency on the Coastliner 36 service, more frequent buses from North Walsham to Norwich and new

late night bus services serving Thorpe St Andrew, Thorpe End, Rackheath, Salhouse, Wroxham and Watton.

Thousands more trees and hedgerows to be planted in Norfolk this winter

As part of the [1 Million Trees for Norfolk project](#) Norfolk County Council is preparing to plant more than 75,000 young trees and hedges across the county in the months ahead.

In 2019, Norfolk County Council agreed an ambitious scheme to plant a million trees over five-years. The pandemic brought many challenges and caused delays which meant at the end of last year the total planted trees stood at just over 68,000.

Now the project is picking up pace rapidly, and early in 2023 the Council's Hedge Restoration Fund will plant 55,000 hedge and tree plants on six County Farms owned by Norfolk County Council.

The hedges will see improvements in nature connectivity across the farms by filling in gaps in hedgerows. This is particularly good for our wildlife as it helps join up habitats and provides corridors for wildlife to safely travel along. The project is funded by a grant from The Tree Council.

£1.5m boost for 12 pioneering jobs and skills projects

From commercial use of seaweed to improving home insulation – 12 projects to boost Norfolk's economy are set to receive £1.5 million from the county council.

Cabinet will consider funding 12 pilot projects to shape Norfolk's economic future, using £1.5 million from the local business rates fund.

The proposed projects are the first phase of the Norfolk Investment Framework (NIF), which will identify long-term investment priorities for the county, to boost the economy and improve public services.

The county council's cabinet will consider 12 pilot projects, which include:

- Exploring development of a seaweed industry to support food, fertilisers, animal feed, biofuels and bioplastics
- Investigating water storage and desalination and the efficient movement of water supplies around Norfolk

- A digital and creative media centre in Watton, to improve skills and encourage start-up businesses
- Working with colleges to support recruitment and retention of skills tutors, including the development of a bursary to support graduates in taking up tutoring jobs
- Investigating the development of a rooftop solar panel network across greater Norwich
- Carrying out a feasibility study on retrofitting homes to maximise energy efficiency

Norfolk's Social Infrastructure Fund gives 10 organisations money to improve community impact

Norfolk County Council has awarded £770,000 to organisations who will be able to make a large positive impact in the communities in which they operate.

This is the third round of Social Infrastructure Funding, which has provided capital grants to organisations who can use the money to improve facilities for communities and boost the level of local community services. This year's funding pot totalled £1 million, with £225,000 to continue the successful partnership with Norfolk Community Foundation in expanding their Nourishing Norfolk food hubs across the county, and £775,000 available for individual projects to improve communities across Norfolk.

Examples of successful projects this year are:

- Whitlingham Charitable Trust who will get £100,000 to resurface and restore the wheelchair accessible path at Whitlingham Country Park
- North Lynn Methodist Church will get £50,000 to renovate and create new space to become an accessible community asset to host a variety of social events
- Banningham and Colby Community Hall will receive £39,790 to complete refurbishments of the hall to offer a welcoming space to bring the community together
- The Charlotte Harvey Trust in Watton will get £38,000 to refurbish and improve their toilets to make the community centre more accessible and fit for the future
- Castle Acre Village Hall in West Norfolk will receive £37,604 to make improvements such as refitting the kitchen and installing solar panels and batteries to invest in the future of the village

- Aylsham Community Church will receive £28,000 to refurbish the Jubilee Family Centre so it can once again offer a warm, welcoming, and safe space for the community
- Silver Road Community Centre in Norwich will get £18,500 to build accessible toilets and make the well-used community space more welcoming
- Sutton Parochial Church Council will receive £12,000 to add a kitchen and toilet to the church to enable it to be used as a community space

Five projects had their applications fast-tracked during the winter of 2022 to enable them to make the maximum impact as soon as possible.

Care farm among six new tenancies for Norfolk's County Farms

Norfolk County Council has welcomed six new tenants to its county farms estate later this year.

Among the new tenants are two couples who are set to join forces to create a new care farm in west Norfolk. NHS workers Alex and Ed Webster will be working with Ben & Gemma Human to set up Ingleborough Care Farm after they discovered both parties were interested in applying for the same tenancy.

In total the six new tenants have taken on just under 750 acres of county farms land from October last year. This follows a thorough application process that began at the end of last year and recently concluded with an interview with a panel of experts.

Norfolk Museum Service secures further funding

In November 2022, Norfolk Museums Service secured £4.126 million of Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation funding for the period 2023-2026. The funding will enable Norfolk Museums Service to deliver new Early Years' programmes across the County, expand our formal learning offer, deliver new targeted programmes to young people 11-25, along with a range of new health & wellbeing activities for residents of all ages. The funding will also support the delivery of new community learning programmes through the NCC Environment Hub at Gressenhall.

New Adult Learning Construction Training Facilities open in Norwich and King's Lynn

In 2022, Adult Learning's vision to support the construction industry and Norfolk's economy by establishing a construction and environmental sustainability curriculum offer for adults in Norfolk, became a reality. A successful tender to the Community Renewal Fund (CRF), which secured £568,000 of central government funding, has enabled Adult Learning to establish two new construction skills training centres in Norwich and King's Lynn. These two hubs are now, in early 2023, receiving the first adult learners on site.

To gather momentum, whilst the two new sites were under development, in January 2022 Adult Learning opened a temporary construction training room at Wensum Lodge, Norwich and delivered a variety of trades, including plumbing, tiling, brick laying, plastering and carpentry, with 400 adult registrations (January to October 2022). The participation rate of female learners was over 30% which compares to a construction industry participation figure of less than 15% in the UK.

No Cold Calling Zones introduced

308 individual No-Cold-Calling Zones (NCCZ) have been set up in the county with 11 new zones being launched in 2022. The 308 NCCZs protect 14,474 individual households across the county.

NCCZs are designated areas where residents have declared that they will not accept traders calling at their homes without an appointment, and act as a deterrent to traders and bogus callers who don't want to be recognised as working in a particular area. The zones are particularly useful and effective in areas where residents might be at a higher risk from cold calling, such as neighbourhoods with a large number of vulnerable or elderly residents. Creating an NCCZ is an effective way of helping to protect them and send a clear signal that residents do not wish to be approached in their homes.

NCCZs are effective as demonstrated by the feedback we receive. Households in NCCZs feel safer, cold calling is reduced or eliminated and residents feel better equipped to manage should traders call:

- *"Since becoming a no cold calling zone area myself and my neighbours feel safer"*
- *"On behalf of myself and residents I wish for you to know our inclusion in this scheme has made our lives more comfortable. The cold calling factor has been very minimal since (shortly after) we joined"*
- *"It is a very good idea. We feel much safer"*

Trading Standards follows up all reports of cold calling in an NCCZ, which may simply involve finding out why a trader has ignored the zone but may include more formal

action. While there is no law preventing cold calling, consumers have 14 days to cancel contracts which have a value of more than £42 when signed at their home or place of work. Traders who do not issue a cancellation notice allowing the 14-day cooling off period are breaking the law and Trading Standards may be able to take enforcement action in these case

£1m funding for out of school activity facilities

Active Norfolk, who are hosted and supported by Norfolk County Council, have secured £1m to support schools to open their facilities outside of school hours to enable local communities to be more active.

Working with the Integrated Care System through 2022, Norfolk County Council will be launching an ongoing programme to enable people to access physical activity opportunities as part of the treatment pathway for long-term conditions such as diabetes, stroke, and cancer. The programme will also build community capacity to support greater equity of access to opportunities for people all across the county.

Working closely with Children's Services, we provided holiday activities and food at Easter, during the summer holidays and over Christmas, for around 10,000 children in 2022. Around 1 in 5 of those children were those with a disability or SEN. This was delivered by c.100 local community providers and invested c.£2m into local organisations.

Adult Learning leads the delivery of numeracy skills of adult residents in Norfolk

The need nationally to improve the numeracy skills of both children and adults has been highlighted recently both through central government and the media.

Norfolk has received £4.7 million to improve the numeracy skills of adult residents through a government initiative called Multiply. This funding will last until the end of March 2025, and by then our target is to secure 11,000 adult registrations onto Multiply programmes in Norfolk.

Adult Learning is leading the delivery of this major new programme, delivering both in-house and through grant funding arrangements with the colleges and other, smaller organisations and grassroots providers. The funding enables us to work with small groups and even individuals on a one-to-one basis.

The funding targets adults who need support with and lack confidence in their numeracy skills and a wide range of interventions are already taking place across the county. These include:

- Introductory courses which help increase people's confidence with numbers
- Courses designed to help people understand and manage their money, particularly during the cost-of-living crisis
- Specific workplace courses, delivered with employers to provide skills relevant to the workplace
- Numeracy courses aimed at parents who want to increase their own skills to be able to better help their children
- Additional maths modules built into existing vocational courses
- Intensive and flexible courses which lead to a Functional Skills Qualification.

While we are in the early stages of the programme, this funding has already made a difference to some of the first learners to complete a course.

Norfolk to benefit from new Family Hubs and Start for Life funding

Children and parents in Norfolk are to benefit from a new cradle to career approach to family support.

The government has just announced that Norfolk County Council will be one of 75 local authorities receiving some of the £302m new Family Hubs and Start for Life funding.

It means the county will receive approximately £6m to further develop its prevention and early help services for families with children and young people up to the age of 19 (25 if they have special educational needs and disabilities).

This is not about introducing a new service or opening new buildings but to allow the county to further develop support for families. Using a whole family approach, the Family Hubs network will give families a single access point to support services that are integrated across health (physical and mental health) and social care as well as voluntary and community organisations and education.

Whilst there will be at least seven physical Family Hub sites in existing community buildings, which families will be able to walk into, services will be delivered largely on an outreach basis. The Family Hub approach will bring together a wide range of services so that families can access support in the spaces and places that they live and visit, such as libraries and community buildings.

The Family Hubs network will provide simple access to 'Start for Life' services, providing the best support for babies in the first 1,001 critical days from conception to the age of two, setting them up to maximise their potential for lifelong emotional and physical wellbeing including:

- Perinatal mental health and parent-infant relationships support for families who are expecting a baby or have a baby under the age of two
- Infant feeding support services
- Parenting support for parents of children aged 0-2
- Home learning environment support for parents of children aged 3-4