

**COUNTY & DISTRICT REPORTS TO WATTON ANNUAL MEETING 20th
APRIL 2021
(Cllr Claire Bowes)**

Annual Report - Norfolk County Council

Norfolk Statistics

- **6,200 miles of highway, 3,000 miles of footway, 5,000 bridges and structures and 53,000 streetlights across Norfolk (40% of which are environmentally friendly LED)**
- **98.0% of highway inspections completed within timescale**
- **99% of dangerous highway defects dealt with within timescales set out in the Transport Asset Management Plan**
- **227,000 tonnes of rubbish dealt with**
- **52,000 Adult Social Care Assessments for 20,000 people**
- **Under 1,000 Looked After Children (LAC) (0-17yrs population)**

The 2021/21 Budget

A **£439 million** net revenue budget, a **£102 million** boost for roads and infrastructure and a 3.99 per cent Council Tax rise has been agreed to support communities, the economy and the environment across the County.

Further, there will be an investment of **£45.7m** to meet cost and other pressures in services, including **£28.2m** in adult social care, **£7m** in children's services and **£10.5m** in community and environmental services.

Within the investment of **£102m** in the capital programme, taking the total infrastructure programme to **£537.66m**, these include **£11.5m** for supported housing for young adults, **£4m** for children's residential homes and investment in the Long Stratton bypass and new libraries.

Additionally there will be an investment of **£2m** to respond to flooding, including an additional **£350k** in revenue budget provision, **£235k** in highways spending to reduce road flooding risks and **£1.5m** for the creation of a new flood reserve to fund urgent works and repairs.

New service from Norfolk Libraries helped families learn from home

Families that were struggling with home learning have a new place to turn to for advice and support. Norfolk Libraries has set up a phone line which serves as a first stop for parents and carers in the county using new devices to teach their children.

The phone line aims to provide a friendly voice to families that aren't familiar with home learning technology, including those that have received a new laptop or tablet as a result of Norfolk County Council's 'Every Child Online' campaign.

Norfolk libraries has scrapped late fees for children as part of post-pandemic reading push

Norfolk County Council has agreed have agreed ambitious plans for the Norfolk Libraries and Information service to improve children and young people's reading skills which have been diminished nationally as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

This includes the removal of overdue charges for everyone under the age of 16, universal membership of the county's e-library through Norfolk's schools and the introduction of a new '1000 books before school' reading challenge.

Norfolk participating in new contact tracing scheme

Norfolk County Council is to oversee all Covid contact tracing in the county, building on the county's successful work to identify close contacts of those who have tested positive for the virus.

The "Local-0" scheme will see cases passed without delay to local tracers at the same time as an individual who tested positive for coronavirus is invited to complete the online contact information. The current approach passes cases from the national NHS Test & Trace taskforce onto local tracers only after the national team has been unable to make contact over a period of 24 hours.

Every Child Online campaign launched

A new campaign which aims to ensure every school age child has a digital device and internet connection to learn remotely at home was launched.

Norfolk County Council has been working with Norfolk Community Foundation (NCF) on the campaign backed by the EDP newspaper to make sure no child is left behind in their learning because of digital disadvantage.

The county council has already co-ordinated the sourcing, prioritisation, and distribution of over 5,000 laptops and tablets, either directly to youngsters or to their schools.

Norfolk hits top spot for second year running in road and transport survey

For the second year running Norfolk has come first among its peers in a national highways and transport survey.

Over the summer 3,300 people in Norfolk were asked for their views on topics such as road safety, highway maintenance, congestion and public transport as part of the National Highways and Transport (NHT) survey 2020.

The results are ranked against other participating councils from across the country to give a nationwide picture of how Norfolk is performing.

Norfolk Flooding Alliance created

In response to winter flooding seen across the County, the Norfolk Flooding Alliance has been created. Led by Lord Dannatt and including bodies such as District Councils, Anglian Water, the Environmental Agency, internal drainage boards, along with Norfolk County Council, the challenges posed across the County can be addressed and tackled.

Housing boost for people with disabilities

One hundred and eighty-one supported housing units are set to be developed in Norfolk, to help people with disabilities live more independent lives.

The County Council will seek to invest £9m-£18m of capital to develop supported, adapted and specialist housing over the next 10 years, to improve people's lives, reduce hospital admissions and reduce care costs by £1.9m per year.

Grant scheme launched to provide free expert advice and cash to help businesses 'Go Digital'

A new grant scheme launched last December will enable micro, small and medium-sized businesses to make better use of digital technology through funding and one to one support.

Go Digital was launched by Norfolk County Council to help businesses based in the county identify digital opportunities. It will provide expert one-to-one consultancy and the ability to apply for grants of up to £500.

Digital opportunities included how to sell products and services online, reach new customers using social media, build customer databases, develop new or existing websites and attract new visitors, or how to work out the best homeworking options for teams.

More vulnerable children in Norfolk supported to remain with their families

A £12-£15 million five-year programme to transform support for children and young people enabled more youngsters to remain with their families.

National statistics reveal the number of children looked after by Norfolk County Council's Children's Social Care was lower, per 10,000 children than that of England (64 vs 67).

Children in care gets below the 1000 barrier

The current numbers of children in care are down to 994, this is from a high of 1200 just over 12 months ago.

This has been achieved by working better and closer with families, to keep children in their family unit and is part of our transformation programme. This is a far better outcome for the children and with Average costs for a child in care at £50,000/annum savings are made. The full savings (200 x 50) haven't been fully realised because the unit costs of our children remaining are on the higher side but this does indicate the impact children in care have on the budget.

We have also increased our in house fostering meaning we use less agency places where again significant savings are with the difference being around £1000/month.

Local Highways Projects

Locally, I am pleased to report on the local road safety initiatives that I have directly helped fund/facilitate over the last two years through my annual County Council member's highway budget and through supporting local parish council's in their bids to the County Council's Parish Partnership Scheme. I have fully funded 'village gates' and on road 30mph road signage at the Brandon Rd entrance to the town and likewise road signage at the Thetford Rd entrance. I have similarly funded the extension of the 30mph limit on the Norwich Rd in Watton/Carbrooke to midway between the Spar roundabout and the Flying Fish. This project is still going through the legal consultation process but I would expect it to be delivered in the next months. Alongside this I supported Carbrooke Parish Council in their Parish Partnership bid for a pedestrian central reservation on the Norwich Rd outside Blenheim Grange. This will be delivered in conjunction with the speed limit extension. I have also funded and supported bids for flashing 20mph signs outside local primary schools. I am very keen to see a 20mph speed limit along Watton High Street and have been consulting positively with highways engineers to this end. My aspiration if elected for another term in May is to see this delivered and to enable it through my Member's Highways budget.

Claire Bowes

County Councillor, Watton Division

Annual Report - Breckland Council

This last year has seen communities and individuals across Breckland come together in force to navigate their way through a very difficult time both financially and emotionally. We are not out of the woods yet and we need to continue to be alert and follow the Covid guidelines.

At Breckland Council, as departments were ordered to work from home, we had to move quickly to get things in place. Fortunately we were in a good position to do this, since the roll-out of Worksmart 2020 and agile working had already begun. Staff adapted quickly and all frontline services were maintained.

Grants for Businesses

Approximately 40,000 grants needed to be processed. While this was money ultimately came from central government, it was a huge undertaking for Breckland Council to ensure that grants reached all qualifying businesses. Many were astonished at how quickly the money landed in their accounts at what was a very disrupting and unsettling time. We have continued with discretionary grants for those businesses that fell through the gap of the grant application process.

Food banks

Breckland Council donated £10,000 to the two food banks in Dereham and Thetford. Further funds have been made available for Dereham to hire new premises, while Thetford has been given an additional £12,500 for the foodbank to purchase its own premises.

Vulnerable residents

As voluntary groups stepped up to protect their communities, Breckland Council was resolute in its support. Officers and staff moved quickly to make sure that vulnerable residents in our towns and villages had access to the help they needed. Many residents offered help in forming small action groups to ensure prescriptions were collected and that people had food on their tables. Some 10,000 meals were delivered and we continue to support where it is needed. Welfare calls were made to isolated and vulnerable residents. It is safe to say that this was a collective effort from Breckland Council, Parish Councils and residents. None of these could have acted in isolation, so we give our thanks to everyone who helped in whatever way in extraordinary circumstances.

Our vulnerability programme has offered extensive support to groups and individuals, through initiatives including our support for the Daisy programme, ongoing Council Tax relief, Silver Social and the new My Social initiative for young carers. The Council granted £60,000 to Norfolk Police for the instalment of NPR cameras to protect our district from the influx of County Lines drug dealers.

Strong financial control

None of the above could have been achieved without a robust fiscal approach to maintaining the Council's property portfolio. Many councils across the country do not have the resources that Breckland has at its disposal and this is testament to our forward thinking business mindset. It is therefore not surprising that again this year Breckland has the lowest district Council Tax in Norfolk.

Market Town Initiative

The MTI is now underway. All five of our Market Towns will receive equal funding. Breckland will work in consultation with the Town District Councillors and Town Councils to make our towns appealing places for

residents and visitors to visit and shop. A local example of one of these initiatives is the replanting of the cherry trees in Watton High Street, something that I was very pleased to propose and see delivered.

Climate Change and sustainability

We will reduce our own impact as an organisation. We will use regulatory powers to influence behavioural change in planning, waste and recycling, and environmental protection, putting climate change at the centre of decision making. The Council has set a net zero target rate for 2035. We have allocated £525,000 to fund projects that will help us meet this target

Progress is already being made with the following initiatives:

- Change of electricity supplier to a green tariff at Elizabeth House
- £825,000 to replace all the streetlights we own with LED alternatives which are already reducing energy consumption.
- £90,000 to fund a new 2-year fixed term Environment and Climate Change Officer.
- £10,000 to carry out an initial carbon audit to understand our emissions more fully.

Further grants will be made available for 'green' initiatives within our communities.

Waste

Our new waste contract is with Serco. Working in collaboration with both Kings Lynn & West Norfolk Borough Council and North Norfolk District Council has seen the purchase of a new fleet of refuse collection lorries. Electric vehicles for rural districts such as ours are not yet available, but the lifters and compactors now used are electric instead of diesel, reducing noise as well as being more environmentally friendly. Serco service vans are electric.

Dog warden

We have been able to retain the services of a dog warden. The Council has for the fifth year in a row received the RSPCA gold award for its work with animal welfare. We have recruited an animal welfare officer who will carry out inspections and visit licensed premises.

Housing help

During the pandemic all rough sleepers were given accommodation. We continue to work with single people and families to help them gain a permanent home of their own. The Elm Road project is underway with an investment of £1.7million. This will deliver Breckland its own temporary accommodation unit to house both families and individuals while they find a new home and, if necessary, employment. It will be a place where people can reset themselves and, with help from this Council, gain the confidence to move forward with their lives.

Grant funding

£100,000 is available for match-funding grants for projects within our towns and villages of up to £5,000. With support from your District Councillor, groups and Parish Councils can apply for a share of this funding. Our grants are overseen and delivered by Norfolk Community Foundation.

Claire Bowes

District Councillor, Watton Ward