

County Councillor Report to Watton Town Annual Meeting April 16th 2024

Council agrees £528m budget

In February Councillors backed a budget that "delivers for Norfolk", in the face of major challenges facing local government.

Deputy Council leader, Councillor Andrew Jamieson, Cabinet member for finance, introduced the budget as a budget for the future, with an additional £60m for adult social services and £35m extra for children's services, and savings from transforming how the council operates.

He pledged to continue to lobby the next Government for multi-year settlements, fair funding and reform of adult social care funding.

County Council leader, Councillor Kay Mason Billig, said the council would continue to be ambitious for Norfolk having already achieved many successes against a tough economic backdrop.

Councillors accept £600 million devolution deal

County councillors have voted to accept a county deal devolution agreement with the Government, to transfer significant funding and powers to Norfolk.

Government funding will start transferring to Norfolk next summer if councillors vote this July to stage the first election for a leader in May 2025. The deal will mean that decisions can be taken in Norfolk, for Norfolk, potentially securing investment of more than £600m over 30 years. If councillors agree the in-principle deal, it will enable us to invest in areas such as transport, skills and job opportunities, housing and regeneration, tailored to the needs of local people.

A County Deal would mean:

- Having a Council Leader who is directly elected by the public, enabling Norfolk's voice to be heard by the Government
- Targeting funding and resources to Norfolk's own priorities
- Unlocking housing and employment sites
- Investing in the skills we need and attracting and retaining key businesses
- Opening the door to more – further powers and funding in future

Norfolk County Council provided extra support to households this winter

Earlier this year, Norfolk County Council announced it would receive further funding from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to run the Household Support Fund until 31 March 2024. 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 adding 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.

Norfolk's roads and footpaths to be fixed as part of £4.51m funding

Thirty-four roads and 20 footpaths across the County will be repaired by Norfolk County Council during this coming year as part of Government funding.

Roads from Great Yarmouth to King's Lynn, from Hunstanton to Thetford and many in between. The entire County 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.

Twenty-seven brand new gritters joined Norfolk's fleet

Twenty-seven brand new gritters took to the roads for the first time 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.

Norfolk flood protection took centre stage in Westminster

The threat posed by flooding and coastal erosion in Norfolk has been laid out starkly for MPs as Norfolk County Council has taken 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.

These risks threaten both Norfolk residents and the contribution Norfolk makes to the wider country, as home to 54% of the offshore wind generation capacity in the UK and a major producer of food.

In a presentation delivered in Portcullis House, Norfolk's delegation made the case for MPs to:

- 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 distributed across Norfolk to deliver the wants and needs of local parishes and residents as part of the Highway Parish Partnership.

The Parish Partnership scheme began in September 2011, when Parish and Town Councils were invited to submit bids for local highway improvements, with the County Council funding up to 50% of bid costs. The key benefits of the scheme are that it:

- Delivers local priorities identified by local people.
- Draws in additional funding for small scale highway improvements, enabling us to collectively deliver more schemes.
- Gives local communities an opportunity to directly influence the improvements in their local area. The programme continues to be well received by Parish/Town Councils, Local

Members, and communities. Information about the number of bids received through the scheme over the past twelve years demonstrates there is a good spread across Norfolk.

For further information please see <https://www.norfolk.gov.uk/parishpartnerships>

More people 'choose the bus' in Norfolk after first year of bus service improvement plan

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. 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.

Passenger numbers across the UK fell dramatically during the covid-19 pandemic with an average drop across the UK of 50.3% but in many areas even more.

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 levels and have increased by more than 12% since January this year.

Norfolk received the sixth highest allocation in the country and the funding consists of £30.9m of capital funding and £18.6m of revenue funding.

Approximately £12 million of the funding was allocated to providing new or expanded bus routes and increased service frequencies on key routes, including more evening and weekend services and this has been very much the focus of the spend in this first year of funding.

- A total of 31 enhancements have been made to services this year bringing more regular bus services to 93 parishes with a population of more than 306,000 people.
- There are now more evening services on key routes across 21 parishes in the county including to **Dereham, Watton**, Thorpe St Andrew and Horsford.
- 49 parishes have an improved Saturday service while 5 parishes are benefitting from improved Sunday services.

In addition to the service enhancements year one of delivering the bus service improvement plan for the county has also seen the following infrastructure improvements.

- The first Travel Norfolk Travel Hub opened in North Walsham providing improved waiting areas with real-time information and integration with walking and cycling facilities.
- A county-wide review of bus stops has started **with Watton bus stop being upgraded to our new gold standard.**
- 84 accessible bus stop boarding points have been delivered countywide.

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 will be eligible for free bus travel 24 hours a day, seven days a week when travelling within the county.

The decision by the County Council, means 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).

The recommendation agreed by the individual cabinet member was to 'extend the concessionary travel discretion of free travel at all times to all eligible disabled passholders and eligible companions, from 1 February 2024.'

The cost of providing this enhancement is estimated at £50,000 which will be funded by the Council's ring-fenced public transport budget provided by the Department for Transport.

Householders can have 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 31st December following changes made by Norfolk County Council.

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.

The change in policy follows Government abolishing charges for the disposal of limited amounts and types of DIY waste at recycling centres across the UK.

Prior to 31st December, customers with DIY-type construction and demolition waste will continue to be directed to the 'Pay as you throw service' which is available at all centres.

Traders must continue to pay for DIY waste. For more information visit www.norfolk.gov.uk/DIYwaste

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District Councillor Report to Watton Town Annual Meeting 16th April 2024

Breckland Council will help residents to live safe and healthy lives by playing an active part in local communities.

- ❖ To provide individuals and families who are homeless with a safe and secure place to stay, we've purchased new temporary accommodation units within our District.
- ❖ Ensuring residents have a say in how the land within Breckland should be used in the future, we've successfully adopted an update to the District's Local Plan. ❖ Acknowledging the impactful work in delivering mental health youth projects, we were nominated for a Norfolk Flourish Award, hosted by the Children and Young People's Strategic Alliance (CYPSA).
 - ❖ We've helped over 3,000 residents who've contacted us for Housing advice and helped over 150 households access temporary accommodation.
 - ❖ In recognition for supporting the health and well-being of residents, we won the Health and Social Care Award at the 2023 Local Government Chronical Awards. The award recognised work by the council, NHS, charities and partners

to tackle health inequalities in Breckland.

- ❖ Acknowledging our exceptional care and dog warden services, we received the RSPCA Platinum PawPrints award; the only Council in Norfolk to receive this accolade.
 - ❖ To maintain our area's cleanliness and having continued our commitment to reduce environmental crime and increased the maximum penalties, we are now ranked in the top 100 Councils for tackling fly tipping.
 - ❖ To support survivors of domestic abuse in the local community we've committed to continue to support and fund the Daisy Programme until 2026.
 - ❖ To promote mental well-being within the local community we've continued to grow our Mindful District Programme by adding a third village and a new training partner and trained over 300 mental health champions.
 - ❖ Aimed at fostering well-being among young people in the district, we've begun to deliver a new youth mental health programme through the Breckland Mindful District Partnership.
 - ❖ Providing access to fresh and affordable food options for our community, we've expanded the Breckland Mobile Food Store to three additional locations.
 - ❖ To provide financial assistance to those grappling with the aftermath of the devastating effects of Storm Babet, we've allocated grants and council tax and business rate relief.
 - ❖ To continue to deliver services which support people who have experienced domestic abuse, declining mental health or financial hardship, we've invested £1.1M of council funding over the next 3 years.
 - ❖ To help local groups commemorate the upcoming 80th anniversary of D-Day, we've made a total of £25,000 available to celebrate and mark the historic event.
 - ❖ In addition to our annual contribution to Citizens Advice, we've strengthened our partnership by funding two Debt Advisors, further supporting their vital debt assistance services.

We will play an active role in creating the right conditions for new and existing local businesses to thrive.

- - ❖ To keep our communities safe, we've repaired or replaced over 70 streetlights.
 - ❖ We've successfully generated over £30,000 in surplus land sales, helping us maintain a balanced budget.

- ❖ To revitalise local market towns, we've launched our Love Your Market Town scheme, awarding £5k grants to support ideas and initiatives which will generate footfall and activity into local town centres in Breckland.

- ❖ We've managed our £45 million commercial property portfolio, allowing the right environment for businesses to flourish and to attract inward investment into the District.

- ❖ With the aim of creating jobs, supporting local businesses and boosting the towns economy, partnership working between the Wayland Partnership and Breckland Council, with funding from Norfolk County Council we are forming plans to develop a Digital and Creative Media Centre in Watton.

- ❖ We've supported local communities to celebrate the King's Coronation.

- ❖ We've continued our collaborative working to support the delivery of power distribution infrastructure at Snetterton and to build upon the success of the new primary substation.

- ❖ To foster economic growth, community development and improved rural infrastructure, we've launched a new Business Support Scheme for small businesses and community organisations. The funds help businesses diversify or grow, bring more customers to the area or to support social economic and local growth through innovation. A number of Watton businesses have been assisted with grant funding.

- ❖ We've helped ensure occupancy of 97% of our commercial property portfolio.

- ❖ To develop skills of our own workforce and creating opportunities for local talent, we've supported over 20 apprenticeships across the Council.

Protecting the Environment and enhancing biodiversity

- To recognise the public sector staff who worked tirelessly during the COVID pandemic, Breckland have funded £25,000 to plant 2,400 trees for a Woodland of Thanks at Oxburgh Hall. The trees will also help with biodiversity and removing greenhouse gases from the atmosphere. To help reduce CO2 emissions the Council has:
 - continued work to roll out electric vehicle charging points in our District including Watton
 - approved the installation of solar panels at Dereham Leisure Centre, saving 47,000 KG of

CO2 per year.

- agreed a New Green Tariff reducing our CO2 emissions for electric to zero.

- secured £530k in decarbonisation grants to reduce carbon emissions in our leisure facilities.

- worked with partners to deliver new environmentally friendly eco-bus shelters in the district. - Replaced 1673 streetlights with energy efficient LED bulbs. To keep our communities pleasant and clean, we've supported over 30 community litter picks and taken over 160 informal actions against fly tippers.

To enable composting, we've grown our garden waste subscribers to over 25,818 residents. This is nearly 40% of our households benefiting from the service, and together composting nearly 10,000 tonnes of garden waste each year.

- ❖ By providing a flexible, reliable, and cost-effective business waste collection and disposal service for Breckland, we've exceeded our customer growth target by 15%, now having more than 305 customers and £220k gross income.

- ❖ To increase our tree canopy cover, we've secured, and have started to distribute, DEFRA funding of £26,400 for the planting of community orchards within our District.

- ❖ To support Breckland businesses, we've launched the Low Carbon Regeneration Programme, providing tailored advice and support for their journey to reducing CO2 emissions and becoming Net Zero.

- ❖ We've improved the energy performance rating, where possible, on our Commercial Property portfolio.

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