

Parish Report – Cllr Andrew Jamieson, January 2025

Norfolk County Council begins path to new powers and funding through devolution from Government.

Norfolk Conservative County councillors have backed a bid to secure new powers and funding to benefit Norfolk. This is called the Devolution Priority Program, or DPP. Devolution involves the creation of a Strategic Authority to take on the strategic roles or economic development, adult and further education, as well as housing and strategic planning in transport and infrastructure.

The full county council discussed and then the cabinet agreed to apply to be part of the Government's priority programme for devolution.

The Government wants to extend devolution of powers and funding, plus local government reform, across England. The Government is moving at pace: It invited councils to express an interest in being part of the first phase, by January 10th.

Ministers want to see a devolution deal covering Norfolk and Suffolk, with an elected mayor. They also want "two tier" areas like Norfolk - where responsibility for key services is split between county and district councils - to replace existing councils with unitary authorities (Local Government Reorganisation (LGR)).

The decision to go ahead with devolution plans is not about agreeing to Local Government Reorganisation (LGR): this will happen to us anyway. All Councils in two tier areas, County, Borough, City and District, will receive letters from the Secretary of State by the month end requesting outline plans for LGR by end March.

We will know by the late summer whether this is a deal that does what it should: provide Norfolk and Suffolk with the financial clout to provide a long-term strategy for economic growth. But we know, because we have seen it before, that there is an early mover advantage. Time and again, new unitary authorities have received the lion share of available funding, while two tier areas were left with crumbs.

By acting as a single, visible figurehead for the area, advocating for our needs at the national and international level, Mayors should attract funding, investment, and partnerships that benefits Norfolk to a far greater degree.

Elsewhere in the country, Mayors oversee large budgets and allocate resources to projects that align with their overall regional strategy. They prioritize initiatives like regional transport networks, housing developments, and skills training programs that require coordinated action across multiple areas.

So, as a result of this move, we have the opportunity of access earlier Funding Opportunities; opportunities that will, in all likelihood, shrink over time.

As early movers we would have greater influence on the design and implementation of devolution policies. We will also, in all likelihood, be better able to influence LGR.

Elections for a Norfolk and Suffolk mayor could then take place in May 2026.

For more information please see the [English Devolution White Paper](#).

To watch the Full Council meeting please following this [link](#)

Council balances budget despite ‘exceptional’ financial pressure

Norfolk County Council have presented their budget for 2025/26 in the face of severe financial headwinds.

The council’s cabinet will consider proposals for a balanced budget, which will see council tax increase by 4.99%.

I need to be straightforward with the people of Norfolk– *funding from central government is totally inadequate* to cover the future cost pressures that local councils will face.

Norfolk County Council remains in a sound financial position for the forthcoming year thanks to the actions we have taken, and the extremely difficult decisions we’ve been forced to make. We continue to see significant growth in demand for our services, in particular in adult social care and, ***because of a wholesale failure of the government to address the issue, there is a systemic failure of SEND at a national level.***

We have also seen the abolition of Rural Services Delivery Grant, equivalent to 1% of council tax. We know how challenging it can be to deliver services in a large, rural

county like Norfolk, so it is disappointing this hasn't been reflected in the government's plans.

We need meaningful, sustainable reform to local government funding that provides local councils with the resources they need.

The Council are calling on the government to:

Reverse the unjustified removal of the Rural Services grant, removed without warning;

Fully fund the direct costs of the Employers NI increase for public sector employees, as previously promised;

Recognise the significant impact of NI decisions on third party providers (particularly providers of social care), and allocate sufficient funding to address this pressure;

Reconsider the arbitrary allocation of the new Recovery Grant, from which Norfolk received zero, to ensure a fairer and more sustainable allocation of funding across all Local Authorities; The

Reset the SEND system, operationally and financially, in order to return to a financially sustainable position and deliver positive outcomes for children with additional needs. Most importantly, Local Authorities need to be repaid in full the cost of funding central governments' growing deficit.

Norfolk set to receive highest highways maintenance allocation in the region

Norfolk is set to receive more than £56 million for highways maintenance this year.

Funding for every local authority across England today can be used throughout 2025/6 on the roads are in most need of repair, and to deliver immediate fixes for communities across Norfolk.

This comes just a few weeks after Norfolk took the top spot for the second year in a row in the National Highways and Transport (NHT) survey on roads and transport. People from across the county gave Norfolk the highest (above average) score in satisfaction with the condition of the highways.

More than 5,300 potholes have been fixed across Norfolk since April this year and of those 99% were repaired by our contractors within the agreed response times. If you see a pothole - don't assume someone else has reported it. Let us know by completing our online form: www.norfolk.gov.uk/potholes

Investment and enhancements lead to increased passenger satisfaction on Norfolk's buses

A recent independent survey through Transport Focus found that overall bus passenger satisfaction in Norfolk has increased by 6% with 87% of passengers satisfied with their journey. That puts Norfolk above the England average of 83%. Norfolk improved in all areas of satisfaction with the biggest improvements being in punctuality and value for money.

Transport Focus is an independent consumer organisation representing the interests of bus passengers across England outside of London. The surveys measure actual passenger experience and provide robust metrics for measuring bus service targets.

Meanwhile the number of people choosing to use the bus continues to grow with almost 7m passenger journeys for the second quarter of the year (May, June, July). That's a 12% increase compared to the same quarter last year.

The improvements are now set to continue with Norfolk County Council being awarded another £15.9m from Government last month to spend in 2025/26. The funding is a mix of capital and revenue and the council is now working with the Enhanced Partnership and stakeholders to decide where the money should be spent.

10 Norfolk schools awarded £5,000 grants to support active travel initiatives

In early 2024 10 schools across Norfolk received a £5,000 grant to pilot Norfolk County Council's Active Travel Survey. The scheme which has been funded using money received from Active Travel England aims to support schools by introducing new active travel and road safety initiatives for pupils.

The initiative which was open to all schools across the county received 74 applications. Following a review by the Active Travel Team and Road Safety Team 10 applications were chosen at random to receive the funding.

With the funds having needed to have been spent by December 2024, the aim was to have helped more staff, pupils, and families adopt active travel options like walking, cycling, or scooting for school journeys. It also is hoped that they will encourage schools to review their policies and safety plans to foster a lasting culture of active travel and road safety.

The successful schools are:

- St. Nicholas Priory Primary School - Great Yarmouth
- John Grant School - Caister
- East Norfolk Sixth Form College - Gorleston
- Aylsham High School - Aylsham
- Norwich High School for Girls - Norwich
- Ormiston Victory Academy - Norwich
- Springwood High School - King's Lynn
- Bignold Primary School and Nursery - Norwich
- Greyfriars Academy - King's Lynn
- Norwich Road Academy - Thetford

Having been awarded the money in July 2024 we've already seen some amazing uses which are having a positive impact on pupils within the schools.

For more information on active travel and road safety education in Norfolk, please visit www.travelnorfolk.co.uk/schools

Norfolk County Council uses bin lorries to map mobile coverage in Norfolk.

Norfolk County Council has launched a new online tool that will help residents to check mobile signal in their area, using data collected from Norfolk's bin lorries.

Last year the council partnered with mobile analysts Streetwave to install monitoring devices on waste collection vehicles across all seven districts in Norfolk.

You can check mobile coverage in your area using the service. [Enter your post code into the online checker](#), or [browse the coverage map](#), which you can filter by network.

These devices measure the quality of mobile networks across the county, collecting data on signal strength and download speeds.

The data covers the four main Mobile Network Operators (MNOs) who are the companies that own and operate the physical infrastructure required for mobile communication services. In the UK they are EE, O2, Three, and Vodafone. Other providers will use one of the MNO networks, for example giffgaff use O2's network, while iD Mobile is based on Three's network. [Check which network your provider uses](#).

The survey devices checked outdoor coverage, with the data from waste collection vehicles supplemented by one fire service vehicle and a backpack-based device used for ad-hoc surveys.

Real-world indoor coverage can be affected by a range of factors, including the construction of a property.

While the data covers many areas of Norfolk it isn't definitive and should be used as an additional tool alongside other sources of information. This information will continue to be updated over time to help everyone make the right choices with the best possible information available.

The results from this coverage checker are taken using mobile handsets that have been physically performing speed and signal strength tests. This differs from the coverage checkers provided by Ofcom or the mobile network operators which are often estimates with limited real-world measurements.

Rollout of new fleet of fire and rescue vehicles to continue into 2025

Four additional tactical response vehicles have rolled into Norfolk as the latest additions as part of a multi-million pound investment by Norfolk County Council to modernise the fire and rescue fleet.

The four Toyota Hilux 4x4s enable firefighters to quickly attend isolated locations and deal with emergencies in spate weather conditions.

At a cost of £175,000, the new fully equipped TRV vehicles, complete with misting units, will be located at Reepham, Acle, Downham Market and North Walsham early in the New Year. They will join the fleet of TRVs already in service at Cromer, Sandringham, Wymondham, Diss and Gorleston, plus a Land Rover at Thetford.

The investment in TRVS is the latest move to provide specialist equipment for Norfolk and comes in addition to the recent £7 million investment of 22 new fire appliances for Norfolk, which replace an ageing fleet that had come of the end of its working life.

Hitting the road over the last 18 months, the new type B Angloco vehicles are now on fire stations at Carrow, Earlham, Sprowston, Dereham, Kings Lynn, Thetford, Great Yarmouth, Hethersett, Attleborough, Wymondham, Diss, Stalham, Aylsham, North Walsham, Holt, Cromer, Fakenham, Downham Market, Watton and Long Stratton. Two others are also in service assisting with training and duty cover. This month, the completion of the project means the final ones have now gone to their home stations.

New wildfire personal protective equipment was recently introduced to enable firefighters the right protection but in a more lightweight form when dealing with intense fires in the hot summer.

Further investment in fleet and equipment, to ensure crews have the best possible resources for all the types of emergencies they face, will be coming into service within the next two years. This includes plans for updated vans for the service's nine hydrant and area technicians, to enable them to have reliable vehicles which contain all they need when out on site.