

County Council Report March 2024 – Judy Oliver

Council budget

The Council has agreed a £528m budget with an additional £60m for adult social services and £35m extra for children's services.

There will be:

£122m of investment to meet demand and cost pressures next year - 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). This would increase the Council's share of band D bills to £1,672.11. A 4.99% rise would generate £24.9m.

Norfolk County Council's share of Council Tax bands, 2024-2025:

- A £1,114.74
- B £1,300.53
- C £1,486.32
- D £1,672.11
- E £2,043.69
- F £2,415.27
- G £2,786.85
- H £3,344.22

A small number of the budget proposals require 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. Proposals that will be consulted on:

- Charging an admin fee for brokering on behalf of people who self-fund their adult social care

- Review of the adult social care non-residential charging policy - including the Minimum Income Guarantee (MIG)
- Recommissioning of social isolation and loneliness contracts
- Norfolk Record Office - pre-booking of visits and new paid services to increase income generation
- Switching off 2% of streetlights
- Recycling centres: Reduction of opening hours at some recycling centres to deliver a more consistent approach, in line with neighbouring authorities

These proposals are part of £41.5m of savings that Norfolk County Council needs to make to balance its budget for 2024/25.

Three proposals which have been launched are:

- **Street lighting:** To switch off some streetlights across Norfolk in areas where it is considered safe and appropriate to do so.
- **Norfolk Record Office (NRO):** To introduce pre-booking of visits and change opening hours.
- **Recycling centres:** To reduce opening hours at some recycling centres to deliver a more consistent approach, in line with neighbouring authorities.

Between them these proposals could save around £457,000 a year.

The council is consulting the public on these proposals until midnight on 22nd March 2024. The consultation survey is available on the council's Citizen Space platform at: www.norfolk.gov.uk/savingsproposals

Proposals on streetlighting involve switching off 2% of streetlights across the county to save money and reduce carbon emissions. Norfolk County Council has identified 34 locations where the council plans to switch off some street lights. This represents 1.35% of the Council's target of 2%. Further locations will be identified at a later date.

Approximately 1,000 of the 54,000 street lights that the county council manages across the county would be switched off under these plans. It is expected that this could save up to £200,000 per year and cut carbon emissions annually by 76 tonnes, providing an environmental benefit and significantly contributing towards the council's Climate Strategy.

The proposal for introducing pre-booking and changing the opening hours of the Norfolk Record Office would extend the current limited Friday

service to a Thursday with the same 10am to 4pm opening hours and maintains a full service on Tuesday and Wednesday from 9.30am until 5pm.

However, compressing the NRO's full searchroom service to two days runs the risk of excessive levels of demand in the searchroom. Therefore, the NRO is proposing to introduce a booking system on those days. People who turn up without booking will still be admitted, providing there is sufficient capacity, but cannot be guaranteed a place. People will be able to book an appointment via email, over the phone or in person at the NRO. These changes could save a total of £57,000 in 2024/25.

Finally, proposals to reduce the opening hours at some recycling centres in Norfolk would see 13 recycling centres close on a Wednesday, in line with the centres in neighbouring Suffolk. The additional six recycling centres in Norfolk operate part time and are already closed on Wednesdays. This proposal could save around £200,000 a year.

The results of the consultation will be reported to Cabinet in June 2024.

People can share their views:

- Online at www.norfolk.gov.uk/savingsproposals
- By email at haveyoursay@norfolk.gov.uk
- By post, writing to:
SAVING PROPOSALS CONSULTATION 2024/25
Freepost Plus RTCL-XSTT-JZSK
Norfolk County Council, Ground floor - south wing
County Hall
Martineau Lane
Norwich NR1 2DH

The consultations close at midnight on 22 March 2024.

Flooding

A delegation from Norfolk, 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.

The 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.

The delegation pushed for =:

- legislative permission to build reservoirs designed to capture excess water in times of flood, for use in times of drought
- property flood protection measures to be granted directly to the Lead Local Flood Authority or faster allocation for those who need it
- reduced bureaucracy by granting greater autonomy in funding allocation for surface water flood mitigation schemes
- combined enforcement and maintenance powers and responsibilities for LLFA's
- the creation of a dedicated Minister for the Coast

24/7 free travel to all disabled bus pass holders

From 1st 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.

More than 14,500 people 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. Previously concessionary pass holders with a disability were only able to travel for free on buses off-peak (all day on Saturdays and Sundays but only from 09:30 Monday to Friday) except for those registered blind or visually impaired.

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

New Rural Business Awards

Norfolk County Council and the Royal Norfolk Agricultural Association have launched the new Norfolk Rural Business Awards. and are designed to recognise the essential nature and huge importance of Norfolk's rural communities and businesses to the region.

Agriculture, forestry and fishing is the fourth largest sector in Norfolk, accounting of 8% of all businesses. And many other businesses across the county are closely linked to the sector including businesses in the accommodation, food, retail, and food science sectors as well as technology and engineering businesses.

The entry form for nominations to each category can be found online at www.norfolk.gov.uk/norfolkrruralbusinessawards.

New film office

Norfolk County Council has awarded Norfolk Screen a 2-year contract to represent the county as its official Film Office. The combined spend by film and high-end television production (HETV) in the UK reached £6.27 billion in 2022, the highest ever reported.

The two-year Norfolk Film Office pilot programme will 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 Norfolk capitalises on the growth of the sector. Any increase in economic activity for the county via additional filming activity will confirm the viability of a stand-alone Film Office.

Peer support for families

The County Council has awarded a one-year contract, starting in April 2024, to deliver a new volunteer peer support service for families in Norfolk who are expecting a baby, or have a child up to the age of two-years-old. It is for those who require practical support to make sure they can give their children the best start in life. Home-Start Norfolk will recruit, train and support volunteers to build relationships with individual families in their own homes or local community venues. The service will also include community-based groups and activities, supporting individuals to access wider social activities within their local area and accessing guided self-help resources.

This support offer is being delivered and funded through the national Government Family Hubs and Start for Life Programme.

Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service

Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service is the first fire service to partner with a charity to help those affected by serious road traffic collisions.

NFRS has signed a 'Memorandum of Understanding' with the Road Victims Trust, so fire fighters at the scene of an accident can signpost people to get ongoing help from the charity. The Road Victims Trust works to help people impacted by grief or trauma following a road death, serious injury or life-changing collision. It offers emotional and practical help, as well as a specialist counselling service.

The charity started offering its support services to Norfolk last summer after receiving funding from the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner for Norfolk. It provides free and confidential support for as long as it is needed to those affected by serious collisions - including witnesses.