

## Budget 2025/26

Despite facing considerable financial challenges Norfolk County Council has approved a balanced budget for the 2025/26 fiscal year.

### Key Details are as follows:

- **Gross Budget:** The council has a gross expenditure budget of £2.2 billion (£1.7 billion excluding schools). This includes:
  - £700 million for Adult Social Care
  - £367 million for Children's Services (non-schools)
  - £283 million for Infrastructure
  - £44 million for Communities and Environment
  - £46 million for Fire Services

**Net Budget:** The net budget for 2025/26 is £572 million. This represents the amount raised through Council Tax to fund the services provided by the council.

- **Budget Growth:** The 2025/26 budget includes an increase of £121 million, which covers:
  - £31 million for inflationary pressures
  - £35 million for legislative pressures (including the increase in the National Living Wage and higher Employers National Insurance contributions)
  - £15 million for demand and demographic pressures
  - Over £25 million to cover recurrent overspends from Adult and Children's Services in 2024/25.
- **Funding and Savings:** While costs have risen by £121 million, funding has only increased by £32 million. The Government has eliminated the Rural Services Delivery Grant and reallocated funds from rural to metropolitan areas. To balance the budget, savings of £45 million have been implemented.
- **Council Tax:** For 2025/26, Council Tax will increase by 4.99%, which includes a 2.99% rise for general Council Tax and a 2% increase for the Adult Social Care precept. A Band D household will pay £1,755.63 per year, or around £34 per week, for County Council services in 2025/26.

## Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation

Norfolk is set to receive new powers and funding following a Government announcement, with the County being a key focus for devolution and local government reform.

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Government is offering a devolution deal that covers both Norfolk and Suffolk, including the creation of an elected mayor. Part of this involves plans to replace the existing "two-tier" system, where key services are shared between county and district councils, with unitary authorities.

As a first step councils have submitted initial proposals to government on how new unitaries could be created. Currently there is a district proposal for 3 unitaries with the county submitting a proposal that leans towards either a single county unitary or 2 unitaries but with a fully evidenced and data driven business case to be completed by September 2025. The county has ruled out 3 unitaries as costing too much and delivering little in the way of savings.

Notwithstanding the different proposals so far it is hoped that the districts and the county can progress towards a unified approach otherwise there is the risk that a new arrangement will be imposed by government.

Although no plans have yet been formulated it is expected that Town and Parish Councils will have an enhanced role in the future.

As a result of being in the situation of setting up a new Strategic Authority for Norfolk and Suffolk, lead by a Mayor to be elected in May 2026, and reforming local government structures in the two counties, the county elections that were due to be held in May 2025 have been cancelled.

A consultation on devolution run by government is currently under way and I would urge everyone to respond through this link [www.norfolk.gov.uk/devolution](http://www.norfolk.gov.uk/devolution). The end date for responses is 13 April.

For more details on the story so far, including the Government's devolution white paper and answers to frequently asked questions from the Local Government Association, visit [www.norfolk.gov.uk/devolution](http://www.norfolk.gov.uk/devolution). You can also [watch our video explaining devolution and local government reform](#).

### **New Economic Strategy**

Ambitious plans for Norfolk's economy through the new strategy, also known the Local Growth Plan, seek to build on Norfolk's influence in key sectors, including clean energy, agri-tech and cutting-edge research.

Norfolk is a global leader for offshore wind with £39bn of clean energy investment forecasted over the next 20 years. In Great Yarmouth, the new Operations and Maintenance Campus is expected to create 650 new jobs and new commercial space for the offshore renewable energy sector. This £24.8m partnership project is a collaboration with Great Yarmouth Borough Council, with enabling works well underway.

Work is also underway to examine how to decarbonise the gas supply through the development of a 'Bacton Energy Hub', reusing existing North Sea assets for carbon storage, and blue/green hydrogen production.

The local Agri-Food and Agri-Tech economy puts Norfolk at the epicentre of addressing challenges around food security and climate change. Norwich Research Park is a world-leading research base at the forefront of global food and health

research. It is Europe's largest single site hub of research, training, education, and enterprise in food and health.

Norfolk is already well known for a visitor economy which accounts for nearly 20% of all employment. The county was recently successful in bidding to become a Local Visitor Economy Partnership, alongside Visit East of England and Suffolk County Council.

### **New Business Grant programme**

As part of the county's five-year economic blueprint the £1.1m Business Growth Fund offers grants of £5k to £50k, covering up to 30% of project costs. The £1.2m Made Smarter Adoption programme will provide grants of up to £20k, funding up to 50% of advanced manufacturing and engineering projects. These initiatives aim to boost key sectors like clean energy, agri-tech, and research, while unlocking private sector investment. Grants will be available from April 2025.

### **East Anglian counties partner with US city for mutual business and economic growth**

The counties of Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex have partnered with Virginia Beach, a US city with booming technology and renewables sectors, to boost transatlantic trade and cooperation through a new Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). Virginia Beach is the largest city in Virginia, about the size of Bristol, halfway down the US East Coast.

The MOU was signed on 12 November 2024 at the US Embassy in London by the three County Council Leaders: Norfolk's Kay Mason Billig, Suffolk's Matthew Hicks, and Essex's Kevin Bentley. Signing for Virginia Beach was the City's Deputy City Manager, Amanda Jarratt.

### **Local Enterprise Partnership moved to County Councils**

Business support and other economy-boosting services delivered by New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) will continue after integration into Norfolk and Suffolk County Councils.

Key functions and employees of the LEP transferred to the authorities on 1 April 2024 as part of the Government's devolution process. Its functions include business representation, strategic economic planning, and responsibility for the delivery of government programmes.

Business support will continue to be provided by New Anglia Growth Hub - which delivers the LEP's business growth programme, including the administration of grant schemes.

The Growth Hub has supported businesses and the region's economy, with the economic impact of its Business Growth Programme measured over a 10-year period at £1,032,797,741, creating new jobs and safeguarding existing employment.

Major construction and infrastructure projects across Norfolk have received significant funding thanks to the LEP's Growth Deal with Government, which secured £223.5m

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for the region to 2021. These include the Herring Bridge in Great Yarmouth, the Digi-Tech Factory at City College Norwich, and Productivity East, the centre for engineering, technology and management at the University of East Anglia.

Both councils have worked closely in the run-up to the transition and are keen to build on the LEP's 13-year legacy.

### **Norwich Western Link**

Although the planning application for the Norwich Western Link has been withdrawn, negotiations are still going on with central government about funding the project and in what state it can proceed. The project remains a priority of the County Council and is supported by a majority of residents and businesses.

### **Norwich Park and Ride**

Good news for Postwick Park & Ride as following a competitive tender process Norfolk County Council awarded contracts to run all Norwich Park and Ride services for up to the next eight years, starting at the end of March 2025.

Two operators have been successful, with First Bus having been awarded the contract to run services from the Airport and Thickthorn sites, and Central Connect (operating as Simonds) providing services from Harford and Postwick. First Bus has committed to running zero-emission buses from the Thickthorn and Airport sites. All four sites will see earlier and later journeys and a service on a Sunday.

The Sprowston site will continue to be part of the overall park and ride system but offering a slightly different service as it will be opened up to local bus services to use as a transport hub on local routes.

### **Long Stratton Bypass**

The main construction work on the new bypass for Long Stratton began in July 2024, following the approval of the full business case from government.

Construction is expected to take 18 months, with the road planned to open by the end of 2025. The work will be undertaken by Octavius Infrastructure Limited who were appointed as the main contractor in January 2024.

The proposed new A140 bypass will be a single carriageway road that will provide a new roundabout junction at Church Lane to the north, extending from this junction on the east side of Long Stratton going south for approximately 3.9km, where it will re-join the existing A140 near Oakside farm.

The current estimated overall cost of the bypass is £46.9m with funding primarily sourced from central government, a £14.5m commitment from the Greater Norwich Growth Board, local developer contributions and Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL).

### **Heartsease Fiveways roundabout**

Work on the final phase of improvements to Heartsease Fiveways roundabout in Norwich finished in May 2024.

### **New Norfolk & Norwich University Hospital roundabout**

Improvements are being made on the main Norfolk & Norwich University Hospital roundabout through a developer-led scheme.

Work on the £1 million-plus scheme started on Monday 9 September and will last for around six months. The work will see improved pedestrian and cycle access to the hospital and nearby research park, alongside the installation of a new Toucan crossing.

The developer is leading the project, with certain elements delivered in partnership with Norfolk County Council and South Norfolk Council. This partnership approach has enabled the improvements to be delivered as a single scheme, reducing disruption to road users during the work.

### **Parish Partnership Scheme**

97 parishes, from Antingham to Worstead, will benefit from projects funded through the Council's 2025/26 Parish Partnership scheme. The programme is designed to deliver what local communities have requested, including trods, village gateways, bus shelters, and vehicle-activated signs.

Blofield, Brundall and Strumpshaw have all received successful bids.

The programme is jointly funded by Norfolk County Council and contributions from Town and Parish Councils. This year, Norfolk County Council plans to contribute £425,476, enabling a total investment of £848,702 for local projects.

### **Government funded highways maintenance**

Norfolk is set to receive more than £56 million for highways maintenance that can be used throughout 2025/6 on the roads that are in most need of repair, and to deliver immediate fixes for communities across Norfolk.

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 2024 and of those 99% were repaired within the agreed response times.

If you see a pothole - don't assume someone else has reported it. Report it by completing the online form: [www.norfolk.gov.uk/potholes](https://www.norfolk.gov.uk/potholes)

### **Four years of Beryl in Norwich**

The UK's leading micromobility provider, Beryl, along with scheme partners Norfolk County Council and National Grid, have celebrated the fourth anniversary of their popular bike, e-bike and e-scooter share scheme in Norfolk.

The scheme has had a significant impact in breaking down the barriers to active travel for people. It has, so far, amassed more than 1,328,000 journeys across nearly 3,885,000km - the equivalent of nearly 100 trips around the Earth.

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It has also had a significant impact on reducing traffic congestion, with user feedback showing that, on average, nearly a quarter of all Beryl journeys have replaced those that would have been taken in a car, van, taxi or motorbike.

According to industry calculations, that has saved over 176 tonnes of harmful CO2 emissions, which is a major contribution towards improving the quality of the region's air.

### **Bus improvements**

Residents living in the North of the county now benefit from the many bus service improvements with more frequent buses, and later buses, operating between Norwich and Cromer/Sheringham and Holt.

The increased services, which are all operated by Sanders Coaches, began on 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2024 and are funded by money that Norfolk County Council secured from the Department for Transport (DfT).

Improvements include:

- A later bus back from Norwich on the X55 service at 22:40 to allow a way back to North Walsham after evenings out in the city.
- Coupled with an increased frequency to the X44/44A service which operates between Sheringham and Norwich a new fast service X41 will be added and this will allow buses to run every half an hour throughout the day Monday to Saturday between Aylsham and Norwich previously every 45 minutes. This benefits those living on route in places such as Aylsham Marsham Hevingham St Faiths and Hellesdon.
- Extra buses on the fast X40 and new X41 journeys will get you to the City or Coast where you can join other services to explore Norfolk further.
- X41 fast buses will serve 3 stops in Aylsham - Burgh Road - Tesco and Norwich Road.
- With the introduction of the X41 from Burgh Road off peak 43 service buses will now serve the west of Aylsham travelling from Willow Park - via Cawston road then Norwich road on route to Norwich.

These are examples of a number of service enhancements which are being funded by the £49.55 million funding which Norfolk County Council was successful in securing from the Department for Transport (DfT) to use on improving bus services across the County over the next three years.

Approximately £12 million of the funding has been allocated to provide new or expanded bus routes and increase service frequencies on key routes, including more evening and weekend services.

### **New all electric bus fleet**

First Bus celebrated the completion of the project to transform its Roundtree Way Depot to an all-electric commercial bus fleet as the operational centre for 59 double deck and 11 single deck brand new state-of-the-art electric buses.

This is not only the East of England's first zero-emission bus fleet but it is also the first complete zero-emission commercial bus fleet in England located outside of London.

The new electric vehicles produce zero tailpipe emissions. This makes them great news for the environment and Norwich's many residents and visitors, as they will help to create a cleaner, greener environment for people to live, work and enjoy. They also offer customers a more comfortable ride, as they are quieter and smoother than diesel vehicles.

The introduction of the new bus fleet means that over half of the Norwich network operated by First Bus is now electric. That is over 60% of all bus journeys through Castle Meadow in the city centre.

### **Hi Tech Gritters**

With 45 brand new gritting vehicles joining the fleet over the last 2 years and all 58 of our vehicles now operating at the highest specifications available, each vehicle runs with brand new auto-salting technology. Aided by satellite navigation, it allows teams to salt the road with limited manual intervention, making the operation more accurate, saving time and reducing waste.

On average, the technology reduces the amount of salt used by between 10% and 15% and saves salt being distributed onto grass verges and other areas that do not require gritting.

Using mapping data, information from the Norfolk network, along with input from our highly skilled drivers, vehicles can track pre-programmed routes making treating Norfolk roads easier and more precise.

Because route data is uploaded into the vehicles, any driver can select any route, set the required spread rate and drive - improving safety and ensuring more effective use of resources and drivers. This means that the network will be treated appropriately and consistently throughout this winter helping to keep Norfolk's roads moving.

Alongside this technology the Roadside Weather Stations across the County are being upgraded as they come to the end of their serviceable life. Recent upgrades include Smallburgh, Cromer and Barn Road Norwich, followed by Wells. These stations collect roadside data, such as road surface temperatures, which enables the Highways Team to decide on gritting actions over a subsequent 36 hour period.

### **Herring Bridge receives further national awards**

The new Herring Bridge in Great Yarmouth, which opened in February 2024, has received further national recognition winning the Major Project of Year award and was also later announced as winner for the Highways Special Merit award across all shortlisted finalists.

This follows the bridge already receiving Major Project of the Year at the New Civil Engineer awards early this summer.

Norfolk's entry was a joint submission with consultants WSP who worked with the council and partners to take the project, constructed by BAM Farrans joint venture, from its inception through to delivery.

### **Booking system at Norfolk Recycling centres**

People going to a Norfolk recycling centre from Monday 18 November 2024 must now book in advance. Bookings can be made up to seven days ahead either online via the council's website or by phoning the customer service centre. The new booking system was live from Monday 11 November.

Additionally, from 1 November trade customers saw a change to the way they pay to dispose of their waste. Businesses will be charged based on the size of vehicle and the type of waste they bring, instead of the number of bags.

The changes will help with service demand, reduce congestion and make sites safer whilst ensuring costs are covered for the disposal of waste.

### **More household hazardous waste days to be held at Norfolk's recycling centres**

Additional household hazardous waste events will be held across the county at seven recycling centres this spring, supplementing the usual autumn events.

The free events will be held throughout April and May 2025, and residents must use the recycling centre booking system to attend. Bookings will open one week before each event.

These events are exclusively for residents disposing of hazardous household waste. They are not open to businesses, groups, or other organisations. If residents do not have hazardous waste to dispose of, they will be directed to an alternative site, as the events are expected to be in high demand.

The spring hazardous waste events will be held on the following dates:

- 4 and 5 April at King's Lynn
- 11 and 12 April at Dereham
- 25 and 26 April at Thetford
- 2 and 3 May at Norwich North
- 9 and 10 May at Hempton
- 16 and 17 May at Caister
- 23 and 24 May at Norwich South

A list of acceptable items for disposal at the hazardous waste days can be found at: [www.norfolk.gov.uk/hazardouswaste](http://www.norfolk.gov.uk/hazardouswaste)

### **Norfolk street lighting goes green**

A project to upgrade street lighting across Norfolk to make it more energy efficient and environmentally friendly has been completed almost a year ahead of schedule. The change will see CO2 emissions on lighting maintained by Norfolk County Council cut by over 200 tonnes a year.

### **500,000 trees planted as part of 1 Million Trees for Norfolk scheme**



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Norfolk County Council has reached the halfway point of its 1 Million Trees for Norfolk initiative, planting the 500,000th tree. The milestone tree, a Norfolk Oak, was planted at Priscilla Bacon Lodge with support from Paul Bussey, who has funded several tree planting projects. Grown by volunteers at Gressenhall Community tree nursery, the tree is part of the scheme launched in 2020 to plant one million trees across the county. The project has engaged local communities, schools, businesses, and landowners, with the council aiming to plant 150,000 trees annually until the goal is achieved.

### **Norfolk signs historic agreement with Ukrainian region of Lviv**

A cooperation agreement has been signed between Norfolk County Council and the Ukrainian region of Lviv which is designed to explore knowledge transfer, educational exchange and trade opportunities.

Both Norwich and Lviv have links to UNESCO: Norwich is a UNESCO City of Literature, and the historic part of Lviv city (300-acre historic centre) is included in the UNESCO World Heritage list. In 2022, Lviv was granted Freedom of the City of Norwich in solidarity with Ukraine, and the MoU - similar to a twinning arrangement - will further celebrate and build on these links.

Norfolk and Lviv have identified several key opportunities for collaborative working, including the TechBridge programme, a strategic partnership between the UK Government, Ukraine Ministry of Digital Transformation and Ukraine Ministry of Foreign Affairs to forge connections between our tech ecosystems.

### **Progress and improvements at Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service**

His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabularies and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) found NFRS had improved in five key areas since its last inspection.

The report recognised the service's sound financial management, positive working culture, and the high priority it gives fire prevention.

Particular praise was given for 'promising practice' in significant incident and multi-agency fatal fire reviews, which are improving outcomes both locally and nationally.

Inspectors found NFRS is good at: understanding risk, responding to major and multi-agency incidents, and ensuring the affordability of its services now and in the future.

They noted a positive working culture with staff feeling empowered to challenge poor behaviours and the service acting to tackle bullying, harassment and discrimination, dealing effectively with disciplinaries, grievances and dismissals.

A good approach to equality, diversity, and inclusion and a good people strategy which aims to attract, retain and develop a diverse and talented workforce, create an inclusive culture, and better represent the community it serves were also noted in the report.

Staff wellbeing is a high priority with a significant range of support available for both physical and mental health and most staff reporting they understand and have confidence in the processes available, the report said.

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In recognition of the progress made, the 'cause for concern' related to preventing fires and risks has now been removed with the service improving its rating from 'inadequate' in this area to 'requires improvement'.

Inspectors recognised the direction of travel on improvements, but said it needs to do more on assurance for the quality of its prevention and protection work, more on training, more to improve diversity in its workforce, and more on identifying and developing leaders.

The report said that NFRS is adequate at: protecting the public through fire regulation; responding to fires and other emergencies; making the best use of its resources and within its workforce promoting its values and culture and ensuring fairness and diversity.

It requires improvement in preventing fires and other risks, getting the right people with the right skills, and managing performance and developing leaders.

### **Household support fund extended**

The Household Support Fund was extended in September 2024 for another 6 months, through Government funding of £421 million to councils to help them support the most vulnerable who are struggling with household bill costs, such as food and energy.

### **Norfolk County Council opposes National Grid pylon scheme**

Councillors in Norfolk have objected to a National Grid proposal to construct an electricity transmission line across the county.

National Grid are planning to build a 114 mile overhead power line between Norwich in Norfolk, Bramford in Suffolk and Tilbury in Essex.

In non-statutory consultations, Norfolk County Council has urged National Grid to reconsider the scheme, but the project will be determined by the secretary of state for energy security and net zero as a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project.

Norfolk County Council's planning and highways delegations committee have agreed to object to the proposal, arguing that alternative options, including an offshore or underground scheme, had not been adequately considered.

County Councillors have backed a motion expressing concerns over the proposals including further consideration of an offshore alternative and of putting more of the power line underground.