Council Delivers Balanced Budget and calls for cost-saving local government reorganisation

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

Key Details from the Norfolk County Council Budget:

- **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 will be implemented.
- **Council Tax**: For 2025/26, Council Tax will increase by 4.99%, which includes a 3% 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.

Norfolk announced as priority area for new powers and funding

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.

Ministers are aiming for a devolution deal that covers both Norfolk and Suffolk, including the creation of an elected mayor. They also plan to replace the existing "two-tier" system, where key services are shared between county and district councils, with unitary authorities.

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**. You can also **watch our video explaining devolution and local government reform.**

Norfolk's highways set for major investment in the year ahead

This month Norfolk County Council Cabinet has reviewed a series of investments and improvements to the county's highways infrastructure.

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

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.

The Cabinet has also reviewed the highways capital programme, which highlights successes from the previous year and outlines how highways maintenance funding will be allocated for the coming 12 months. This includes an additional £15 million from the Department for Transport (DfT).

With this extra funding, an additional 100 miles of roads in Norfolk will be resurfaced this year, supporting the Council's proactive approach to highway maintenance that helps prevent potholes. The funding will also provide additional resources for local repairs and patching across the county.

Funding boost for active travel in Norfolk

Active Travel England have today announced an additional £4.45million for active travel in Norfolk as part of a **wider nationwide funding package totalling almost £300million.**

The additional £3.35m for 2025/26 is an outline allocation at this stage and comprises both capital and revenue funding. This means it will be used to fund new active travel initiatives and behaviour change programmes in addition to the delivery of new infrastructure but no decisions on which schemes will be funded have been made.

The next step will be to prepare proposals for Active Travel England once we receive further details on how the allocation can be spent in the coming months.

New apprenticeship starts in Norfolk increase by a staggering 11%

Apprenticeship starts with Norfolk businesses and organisations surged by 11% in the first three months of the 2024/25 academic year, compared to a national increase of less than 1.5%.

From 1 August to 31 October 2024, there were 2,025 new apprenticeship starts in Norfolk, marking a rise of 199 from the same period in 2023/24. This represents the highest number of starts in this timeframe in over five years.

Apprenticeships Norfolk reports growth across all age groups, with starts up by 7.4% for those aged 16-18, 9.6% for 19-24-year-olds, and 14.6% for those aged 25 and over. Notably, the 16-18 age group saw its strongest first-quarter performance in over five years.

Department for Education (DfE) data also highlights an increase in recruitment, with the number of 'newly recruited' apprentices (those employed for up to three months at the start of their apprenticeship) rising by 10.4% from the previous year. This translates to 94 more starts.

In terms of employer size, non-levy funded apprenticeships, typically started by small to medium-sized businesses, grew by 10.3% (69 more starts) compared to 2023/24. Larger businesses also saw growth, with an 11.2% increase, adding 130 more apprenticeships.

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

As part of the Norfolk County Council budget for the upcoming year, additional household hazardous waste events will be held across the county. These events will take place 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

Please note, there will be no hazardous waste events over the Easter weekend.

A list of acceptable items for disposal at the hazardous waste days can be found here: www.norfolk.gov.uk/hazardouswaste

Norfolk County Council to combat "hidden unemployment"

Over 4,000 people in Norfolk facing barriers to employment, including disability and long-term health conditions, will receive support through a new programme.

Connect to Work is a key initiative within the *Get Britain Working* strategy, aimed at linking health and employment services to achieve both improved employment outcomes and better health.

A triage service will act as the entry point to the programme, with the capacity to handle up to 1,200 referrals each year during the main delivery phases. The programme is expected to support up to 4,300 Norfolk residents from October 2025 to March 2030.

In Norfolk, 109,100 individuals (20.6%) aged 16-65 were classified as economically inactive in 2024, 1.5% higher than post-COVID and 30,100 (27.7%) had long-term sickness, compared to 23.7% in 2019. This is above the East of England's figure of 25.9% and the UK average of 27.2%. However, of those economically inactive in Norfolk, 32.5% (32,500 people) reported wanting a job, which is higher than the average in the East of England (18.6%) and the UK (17.6%).

Connect to Work will primarily focus on supporting disabled individuals, those with long-term health conditions, and others with complex barriers to employment who wish to

work. The programme aims to reduce economic inactivity and drive inclusive economic growth.

Norfolk County Council currently oversees the *Working Well Norfolk* project, which has been successful enough to have its funding extended for an additional 18 months. From its launch in October 2023 to January 2025, the scheme received 1,934 referrals, enrolling 1,250 individuals, with 445 people supported into employment or helped to remain in work.

Working Well Norfolk will continue accepting referrals until September 2025 and provide ongoing support for participants and their employers until September 2026, assisting an additional 580 people.