

Parish Report – February 2025 – Cllr Andrew Jamieson

Norfolk announced as priority area for new powers and funding

Further to my report last month, Norfolk is set to gain new powers and funding following a significant Government announcement on 5th February 2025. Deputy Prime Minister Angela Rayner revealed that Norfolk would be a priority area for devolution and local government reform. As part of this, the Government is seeking to create a devolution deal for Norfolk and Suffolk, which would include the introduction of an elected mayor.

In addition, there are plans to reshape local governance in Norfolk. The Government intends to replace the current two-tier structure, where services are shared between county and district councils, with unitary authorities. This would centralize decision-making and service delivery into a single authority, streamlining local government processes and potentially increasing efficiency.

See my comments on 18th February at Full Council on how we should reach a decision on the shape of Norfolk in the future:

- **“Therefore, I would like to close by looking ahead:** this creates an opportunity for the Public Sector, not just local authorities. As I said, we are on the verge of transformational change to the local Government landscape. While dizzyingly complex the details may be, the overarching strategic objective is very, very simple:
- What is best for your residents: for the people, communities and businesses in Norfolk?
- If you want a structure that does not deliver the maximum savings: tens of millions of pounds a year, you must justify that structure to your residents;
- If you want a structure that does not deliver the greatest administrative efficiencies on for social care, children's services, SEND, housing delivery, homelessness and public safety, you must justify that to your residents;
- If you choose to make transformation harder than it need be, costing many millions of pounds to disaggregate and reconstruct, you must justify that cost, in both money and welfare, to your residents.
- If you do not ensure democratic oversight and neighbourhood empowerment, you will be held accountable by your residents.
- We must ensure a new landscape offers the most value for money, with the most efficient service: we have the chance to be **far more streamlined: far less costly**

If done right, a new unitary system supporting a new strategic authority will deliver tens of millions of additional investment and save tens of millions in the delivery of services.

Done wrong, by putting politics before the people, our residents will not forgive us.”

These changes will empower local areas with more control over their services and funding. For further details on the progress of devolution and the impact of these reforms, visit www.norfolk.gov.uk/devolution, where you can also find answers to frequently asked questions from the Local Government Association. To watch an informative video [go to our video explaining devolution and local government reform](#).

Council Delivers Balanced Budget, call for cost-saving local government reform

Norfolk County Council has agreed a balanced budget for the fiscal year 2025/26, despite facing significant financial pressures.

The budget, which was agreed at the full council meeting, was presented by deputy leader and cabinet member for finance, Councillor Andrew Jamieson.

He emphasised the council's dedication to maintaining stable and sustainable finances while delivering essential public services.

"We have had to make difficult decisions to ensure a robust and balanced budget, particularly in light of increased demand for our services."

"The abolition of the Rural Services Delivery Grant and the increase in National Insurance have added to our financial pressures, but we remain committed to delivering high-quality services to the people of Norfolk."

"We continue to see significant growth in demand for our services, particularly in adult social care and SEND, where there are systemic issues at a national level that haven't been addressed."

"It also underscores the need for an effective and efficient structure under local government reform. Any proposal for the future of local government in Norfolk will need a credible plan to save taxpayers money - without fragmenting essential services."

Norfolk was recently accepted onto the Devolution Priority Program which would see additional money and powers coming to the region.

Councillor Jamieson added:

"Devolution gives us the key to grow the economy, provide high wage jobs and greater aspiration for future Norfolk generations. If done right, a new unitary system supporting a new strategic authority will deliver tens of millions of additional investment and save tens of millions in the delivery of services."

Key facts and figures from Norfolk County Council Budget

- Gross budget: Norfolk County Council has a gross expenditure budget of £2.2 billion (£1.7 billion excluding schools)
 - We spend over £700 million in Adult Social Care, £367m in Children's Services (non-schools), £283m in Infrastructure, £44m in Communities and Environment and £46m in Fire.
- Net Budget: The Council has a net budget for 2025-26 of £572m. This is the amount we raise in Council Tax to fund the services we provide.
- Funding and savings: At the same time as £121m cost pressures, external funding has only increased by £32m. Government has abolished Rural Services Delivery Grant and diverted funding from rural areas to metropolitan areas. To balance the position, the 2025-26 budget includes savings of £45m.
 - Council tax: For 2025-26, an increase of 4.99%, including an increase of 3% for general council tax, and 2% for the Adult Social Care precept.
 - A Band D household will pay £1,755.63 per year, or approximately £34 a week, for County Council services in 2025-26.

Norfolk County Council 2025-26 council tax bands:

- A - £1,170.42
- B - £1,365.49
- C - £1,560.56
- D - £1,755.63
- E - £2,145.77
- F - £2,535.91
- G - £2,926.05
- H - £3,511.26

Multi-million pound business grants unveiled at launch of ambitious economic plan for Norfolk

Norfolk has launched new grant programmes as part of its 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. For more details, visit the [Made Smarter Adoption Programme East of England webpage](#).

Working Well Norfolk helping people with long-term health issues to keep working

A scheme to support people in Norfolk with long-term health issues get back into employment or continue in their jobs has already helped more than 1,100 participants.

The Working Well Norfolk programme, launched in October 2023, supports individuals with long-term health issues to return to or stay in work. It has already helped over 1,100 participants, with 200 moving into work and 150 staying employed despite health challenges. The programme has received 1,600 referrals and will continue for another 18 months, with additional funding to help 730 more people, totalling 1,830 participants by September 2026. The £5.2m project is managed by Norfolk County Council and delivered by Seetec Pluss and Standguide Ltd. For more info or to refer, visit [Working Well Norfolk - Seetec Pluss](#) or call 01603 561054.

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

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.

Get hands-on with technology at your local library throughout February

DigiFest is an annual celebration of digital creativity held across Norfolk libraries throughout February, offering free events for children and young people up to age 16. The festival, part of Norfolk County Council's digital inclusion strategy, aims to inspire the next generation of coders and creators by helping hundreds of children develop new skills, boost confidence, and have fun.

Over 100 free events will take place in 47 libraries across Norfolk, including activities like stop-motion animation, basic coding with robots, and 3D pen creations. Special sessions include Lego™ robotics with ICT Solutions, cyber security escape rooms in Thetford and Great Yarmouth, and a virtual reality workshop in Norwich hosted by UST.

DigiFest runs from February 1-28, with many events scheduled during half-term week. All events are free, but pre-booking is required for most. For more information, visit www.norfolk.gov.uk/digifest

Made Smarter to boost region's manufacturing and engineering sector

Advanced manufacturing and engineering SMEs in the East of England will receive funding and tailored support through the Made Smarter Adoption East of England programme, managed by Norfolk County Council. The £1.2m grant scheme, in partnership with the Department for Business & Trade, aims to help SMEs adopt Industrial Digital Technologies (IDT) by offering impartial advice, digital readiness roadmaps, and leadership development programs to upskill their workforce.

The programme seeks to address key growth barriers such as limited awareness of IDT and challenges in accessing funding for IDT adoption. SMEs can apply for match-funded grants of up to £20k to invest in new technologies in 2025-2026.

In the pilot year, the programme expects to engage 133 businesses, conduct 80 digital roadmap sessions, provide leadership training for 20 senior leaders, and support 24 operational managers in workforce development. It is also anticipated that 24 match-funded grants will be awarded.

The East of England is the UK's third-largest region by GVA, with manufacturing accounting for 10.4% of its output, above the national average. The largest manufacturing sectors in the region include Food & Drink, Pharmaceuticals, and Machinery Equipment. Manufacturing jobs in the region make up 7% of the workforce.

Made Smarter, a partnership between industry and government, aims to help UK manufacturing thrive through digital tools. The initiative projects significant benefits, including an additional £455bn in GVA, a 30% productivity increase, 175,000 new jobs, and a 4.5% reduction in CO2 emissions by 2027.

Following the integration of the New Anglia Advanced Manufacturing and Engineering (NAAME) sector support program into Norfolk County Council, the Made Smarter Adoption programme results from ongoing discussions with East of England authorities and stakeholders. The programme's delivery will be monitored by the Made Smarter East of England Programme Board, which includes industry representatives and officials from Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex, Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire, and Cambridgeshire.

Businesses can register for the programme starting 1 April 2025 via the national Made Smarter Adoption website. For inquiries, contact madesmarter@norfolk.gov.uk.

Campaign sees nearly 2,000 potentially dangerous batteries and chargers removed from sale

A regional campaign led by Trading Standards from nine local authorities in the East of England removed over 1,800 potentially dangerous batteries and chargers from sale. This action followed a rise in fires involving lithium-ion batteries, commonly found in devices like phones, laptops, and power tools. Trading Standards tested 22 items, all purchased online, with 13 failing safety checks, including risks of fire and electric shock.

Residents are advised to follow charging recommendations and avoid charging devices while asleep or away. For safety tips or to report unsafe products, visit www.norfolk.gov.uk/lithiumbatteries or contact Citizen's Advice Consumer Service at 0808 223 1133. In case of a fire, evacuate immediately, call 999, and avoid re-entering the building. Dispose of lithium-ion batteries at recycling centres, not in household bins. Visit www.norfolk.gov.uk/recyclingcentres.

Norfolk Youth Justice Service rated "good" with staff who go "above and beyond" for children

Norfolk Youth Justice Service (NYJS) has received an overall rating of "good," after an inspection by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation (HMIP), describing staff as "motivated" and "creative" going "above and beyond" to support the children they work with.

The report followed a visit by inspectors in October - the first in 12 years.

NYJS is a multi-agency partnership hosted within Norfolk County Council's Children's Services. Its aim is to prevent children from offending, help them repair the damage they cause victims and help children achieve their potential.

The inspection found the governance of Norfolk YJS to be strong, with an experienced independent chair of the management board, who is "skilled and knowledgeable." The quality of resettlement policy and provision was separately rated as "outstanding."