

**Andrew Jamieson. Final Parish report as County Councillor for North Coast Division.**

**Norfolk County Council – Annual Parish Report 2025-26**

<b>Our Promises</b>	<b>What Was Delivered</b>	<b>Impact</b>
<b>Libraries &amp; Culture</b>	Built new libraries, invested <b>£3m+</b> , and transformed <b>Norwich Castle</b> into a world-class attraction	Stronger cultural offer and a major boost for tourism
<b>Better Care</b>	Invested <b>£40m+</b> in care homes and supported living	More residents able to live independently for longer
<b>Backing Our Children</b>	<b>GOOD-rated services, £2.5m+</b> for care leavers, <b>£5m</b> for jobs, and <b>600+ opportunities created</b>	Better life chances and stronger futures for young people
<b>Better Roads</b>	Major infrastructure projects completed and <b>£10m extra</b> invested in maintenance	One of the <b>best-performing highways services</b> in the country
<b>Improved Buses</b>	<b>£50m+ invested</b> , more electric buses, and <b>26% growth in passenger numbers</b>	Cleaner travel and better public transport access
<b>Protecting the Environment</b>	<b>850,000+ trees planted</b> and emissions cut by <b>50%</b>	Protecting Norfolk’s countryside and tackling climate change
<b>Growing the Economy</b>	Investment in high streets, improved connectivity, and <b>hundreds of new homes built</b>	Stronger local economy and thriving communities

Norfolk County Council, under a Conservative administration, has a strong record of delivering on its promises and investing in the county’s future. New libraries have opened in Great Yarmouth and, of course in Kings Lynn. I have continued to develop plans for the library in Hunstanton and plans are now underway to relocate the service to the Community Centre: providing the type of hub that you can now see so clearly in Kings

Lynn. We have levered in significant sums for major road schemes across the country: Herring bridge in Yarmouth and the Long Stratton bypass on the A140. The Norwich Western Link is one of the few major schemes that the department for transport is prepared to continue to back; another being on the A10 at west Winch. We are investing over £40 million in Housing with Care and Ofsted have signalled a significant improvement across in children's services; we have built 11 Special Resource Bases in our schools plus specialist education schools across the County, the most recently announced being Downham Market. We have focused on the priorities that matter most to residents. We have strengthened local transport, spent increased funding on footpaths, supported businesses and high streets, expanded opportunities for young people, and taken meaningful action to protect Norfolk's environment. This is a council that combines experience with action backing communities, improving services, and driving sustainable growth, while continuing to stand up for Norfolk and secure the investment it deserves.

### **Norfolk County Council delivers a balanced and responsible budget for 2026–27**

Norfolk County Council approved a balanced £613.8m budget for 2026–27, demonstrating strong financial leadership and prudent management in what remains one of the toughest funding climates in decades.

The administration has once again delivered stability and certainty for residents, setting a balanced financial position while identifying £42.3 million in savings and efficiencies and committing £76.3 million in targeted investment to protect vital services and strengthen Norfolk's economy.

Despite significant national financial pressures and ongoing constraints in central government funding, we have ensured the county remains on a firm financial footing, without resorting to emergency measures. This stands in stark contrast to a growing number of upper-tier authorities across the country that have issued Section 114 notices or are facing effective bankruptcy.

The budget enables the council to continue:

- Protecting frontline services
- Investing heavily in adults and children's services
- Delivering new libraries and modern learning hubs in key towns
- Supporting for heritage, culture, and tourism
- Driving transformative reforms to improve efficiency and outcomes
- Backing economic growth and infrastructure

- Maintaining long-term financial sustainability

In line with national funding assumptions a 4.998% increase in council tax was implemented due to the government's continued reliance on placing the burden on local taxpayers to safeguard core services. This decision reflects the financial realities facing councils nationwide, while ensuring essential services remain protected for Norfolk residents.

This budget reinforces Norfolk's Conservative administration's commitment to careful stewardship of taxpayers' money, strong local services, and a resilient future for the county.

### **Norfolk County Council invests in community led highway improvements and community projects across the county**

Norfolk County Council has reaffirmed its commitment to supporting local communities with the approval of 99 new highway improvement schemes for 2026-27, delivered in partnership with town and parish councils across Norfolk.

Papers highlight how the Parish Partnership Programme, now entering its fifteenth year, gave local communities a voice in shaping the highways enhancements that matter most to them, whether that's improving pedestrian safety, slowing vehicle speeds, or making it easier to walk, cycle or access local services.

This year's programme represented a total investment of £769,034, made possible through the longstanding 50/50 funding model. Town and parish councils will collectively contribute £384,517, matched by £384,517 from Norfolk County Council, enabling more than twice as many small-scale schemes to be delivered than could be funded by the council alone.

In total local councils submitted 99 bids for 2026/27 and all were approved as viable schemes after being carefully assessed against value for money, community outcomes, safety benefits and compliance.

## **Norfolk County Council Approved £500k Community Fund to Boost Local Projects**

Norfolk County Council approved the launch of a new £500k Norfolk Community Fund for 2025/26, aimed at supporting grassroots projects that strengthen communities and improve local wellbeing.

The fund will empower local voluntary, community, and social enterprise (VCSE) groups to apply for grants between £200 and £2,500 to deliver small-scale initiatives that bring people together, promote inclusion, and enhance quality of life. Each of the county's 84 councillors will be allocated £5,000 to distribute within their divisions, ensuring funding reaches every corner of Norfolk. Alongside the £11,000 Local members Fund, these two schemes underline how the County council looks to support local projects and improvements.

## **Norfolk's bus service improvements deliver record growth and faster journeys**

Norfolk County Council's ambitious Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) has transformed public transport across the county, driving a 26% increase in passenger numbers since 2022 and making Norfolk a leading national example for sustainable travel.

A paper discussed at the council's Infrastructure and Development Committee on 22<sup>nd</sup> January highlighted what has been delivered thanks to the £65.45 million secured for Norfolk from the Department for Transport. That includes;

- New and enhanced bus services on more than 44 routes across Norfolk, including more evening and Sunday services
- Affordable fares: capped single fares in key towns and multi-operator ticketing
- Greener fleet: 75 zero-emission buses in Norwich and 24 more electric buses coming in 2026
- Improved passenger experience: real-time information, safer waiting areas, next-stop announcements and real-time information on more buses.

Not only are we seeing record-setting and increasing numbers of passengers, but customer satisfaction has also risen to 87%, bucking national trends and reinforcing Norfolk's approach to improvements in bus travel across the county.

## **Norfolk gritting vehicles headed out over the winter season**

Norfolk has over 6000 miles of roads to maintain, some 2,200 of which need to be gritted each time the temperature drops, using a 58 strong fleet with automated salting, supported by stocked salt barns and public grit bins. Norfolk County Council's winter

gritting got underway during the recent winter, with gritters active on A/B roads, key bus routes, and village access roads, using new tech for efficiency. Notwithstanding we are putting funding in next years' budget to ensure that roads are gritted to all schools, including to Hunstanton primary.

### **Norwich Castle Keep reopens following £27m redevelopment**

Norwich Castle Keep reopened to visitors following a comprehensive five-year redevelopment project that introduced new accessibility features alongside new galleries and interpretive displays.

Funded by over £12 million from Norfolk County Council and over £13 million from the National Lottery Heritage Fund, all five floors were opened to the public for the first time.

The Grade I listed castle, originally commissioned by William the Conqueror 900 years ago and completed by his son Henry I in 1121, retained its historic significance while embracing modern improvements.

A new light-filled atrium adjacent to the Keep was unveiled in the first phase of the redevelopment in July 2024. Visitors also benefited from a new café, gift shop, and additional toilet facilities to enhance the visitor experience.

Importantly, a lift was installed to provide full wheelchair accessibility throughout the Keep, allowing access from the basement all the way up to the battlements, where visitors could enjoy panoramic views across Norwich.

### **Nationally recognised 'AI programme to be rolled out across Norfolk to prevent falls**

A new, nationally recognised proactive intervention scheme is rolled out across the whole of Norfolk. The initiative was delivered in collaboration with local partners including Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprises (VCSE), city, district and borough Councils and NHS organisations, aims to reduce falls in vulnerable and older adults.

Following a successful pilot with 1250 residents, the programme, which uses Artificial Intelligence (AI) to identify residents at risk of escalating needs, enhances the safety and wellbeing of those at risk of falls. The latest Artificial Intelligence technology, natural language processing is used to 'read' case notes and automatically extract meaningful insight about our residents. This technology enables the council to identify and prioritise individuals in Norfolk most at risk of falling, allows for proactive intervention before they fall.

AI is a rapidly developing technology with the potential to improve the delivery of services. The council is using AI to benefit the people of Norfolk in a safe, ethical and transparent way.

Falls are a major concern, particularly among older or vulnerable adults, and can lead to severe injuries and a decline in quality of life. Through this programme, the council will be able to predict people who are at higher risk and offer timely and targeted interventions to support them. For more information about preventing falls visit [Preventing and dealing with falls](#).

### **Norfolk County Council took first place in the Eastern region in annual Highways and Transport Satisfaction Survey**

I know that this next is unlikely to win me many friends, but.....Norfolk County Council has once again demonstrated strong performance in the National Highways and Transport (NHT) Public Satisfaction Survey, taking the top spot in the Eastern region for overall satisfaction and second out of 29 county councils across England.

The annual survey, which gathers public views on highways and transport services, saw Norfolk achieve an overall satisfaction score of 48%, well above the national average of 40%.

This marks the 15th consecutive year Norfolk has participated in the survey, and the 7th year in a row that we have come either first or second overall. I am sure that trips to Cambridgeshire and beyond will always demonstrate that things could be a lot worse!

Key highlights from this year's results include:

- Top Regional Performer: Norfolk ranked 1st in the Eastern Region for overall satisfaction.
- Some of the best above average score were in our bus services thanks to improvements that have been made as part of our Bus Service Improvement Plan. The 'local bus services' overall category we were 10% above the group average with sub indicators as follows:
  - Public Transport Information (11% above group average)
  - Frequency of bus services (9% above group average)
  - Ease of access to school / work (6% above group average)
- Condition of highways (8% above group average)

## **Norfolk County Council's Deep Disappointment at Government Decision to Halt Mayoral Election and Slash Devolution Funding**

Norfolk County Council expressed serious concern following the Labour Government's announcement that the planned 2026 mayoral election for the Norfolk & Suffolk Combined County Authority will be deferred until 2028. The sudden decision meant that Norfolk would now receive only around one-third of the investment previously promised under the devolution programme.

## **Norfolk County Councils astonishment at the Government's decision to create 3 Unitaries for Norfolk under Local Government Reorganisation**

Norfolk County Council made a robust bid for a Single Unitary council for Norfolk under the proposals for LGR. This bid was based on sound financial information with the primary purpose of protecting front line services, whilst ensuring value for money. NCC already deliver 85% of local services in Norfolk, a single unitary was the easiest to implement, would ultimately save money for taxpayers and was the most obvious choice for the county. It was also backed by key stakeholders like the NHS and the Police. None of the other proposals, which would split services and cost more to implement and run, stacked up. It is therefore disappointing that despite the 3 unitary proposal not meeting the government's own criteria, that this is the option chosen. This may be more a political decision than a practical one and seems irrational. The council will consider the details of the decision and may choose to challenge this.

## **A new County Councillor for north Coast.**

As Norfolk County Council prepares for the May elections, in light of these last two body blows for Norfolk's residents, I have decided that I cannot continue to be part of Norfolk County Council. As a result I have taken a little time reflecting on what we've achieved over this term in office.

It has been an honour to be the cabinet member for finance for the last 7 years, tackling major financial challenges and seeking the opportunities to invest for the future.

As detailed above independent living schemes, new schools, and our imminent deal to transform ageing care homes are tangible signs of how our administration has put the people of Norfolk first.

In particular, I am proud to have worked financially with the Children Services team, enabling them to improve from inadequate to the highest ranking in overall care quality.

We are in politics to improve lives and that's what we have done – whether we're in the cabinet, or the committees that hold us to account.

While other councils have gone bust or sought emergency financial support, Norfolk County Council has continued to set balanced budgets, thanks to efficiency savings and transformation work that has limited our requirement to cut frontline services.

Our debt is fixed, often as long as 50 years, at rates as low as 1.8%. The money is invested in Norfolk: our roads, our schools; our housing with care; our fire and rescue service-buildings and appliances; new libraries; new buses and better travel hubs, including in Kings Lynn and Hunstanton; better broadband. Total debt may seem a lot, but it should be measured relative to the county's ability to repay, currently we pay 7% of total net revenue in repayment and interest, less than the government. Unlike the government, we cannot borrow to fund recurrent revenue, only capital assets.

There is no doubt that the task of balancing the books has got trickier each year and that was why I was looking forward to local government reorganisation, to put our sector on a more secure footing. It's a once in generation chance to ensure councils reflect the modern world.

I have always been clear that having one unitary council for Norfolk would be the best result for the county's residents and businesses.

It would be able to make the largest savings to invest in services; it would avoid the dismemberment of crucial, county-wide services such as adult social care, children's services and highways and transport; and it would avoid a postcode lottery of provision, by having strong service delivery across the whole of Norfolk, linked to area committees.

I have always warned that splitting Norfolk into three unitaries would put political vanity above public service and risk creating unviable authorities – especially here in the west of the county. We simply will not generate the revenue to care for the elderly, to deliver what is needed to continue the work in Children's Services: forced back onto the ropes of our statutory obligations, a small council will have to abandon non statutory services (libraries, the economy, heritage....). stand by for paying a lot more and getting a lot less.

So the Government has not listened to logic and facts. It has put politics before principle. And it has decided to take what I think is the perilous step of supporting 3 unitary authorities.

I am immensely proud of Norfolk County Council and its achievements and I had hoped to see things through to the end of this fine organisation in 2028. I wanted to be a founding father of a new unitary council.

While I don't agree with suspending elections, the Government's initial decision to do so at least gave the benefit of stability and the space and time to get our much cherished devolution deal over the line.

Devolution would bring millions of pounds of investment and give Norfolk and Suffolk control of its own destiny in areas such as transport, regeneration, housing and skills.

Unfortunately, the recent U-turn has thrown everything up in the air. Having elections at this crucial point in time means we've had to pause devolution, with no certainty that the

next administration will support it; it throws preparations for local government reorganisation into confusion, as we will have scores of new councillors who have a very steep learning curve; and I am concerned that prudent financial planning could be replaced by populist slash and burn budgeting, hollowing out our key services, at a time when people need them most.

However, I would like to take the opportunity to thank the all Parish Councils, Parish Meetings and, of course Hunstanton Town Council, that have worked with me to achieve so many local improvements. I would also like to recognise voluntary groups, residents and local businesses for their support, hard work and dedication to so many causes: at a time of increasing dissent and danger, it gave me enormous faith in the power of communities that come together; I hope I was able to help you all as well.