

2018 Annual County Council Report

Council Tax

This year Norfolk County Council has agreed an overall increase of 5.9% to cover the increasing cost of services. 3% of this is for Adult Services as we have an increasingly ageing population needing care and support.

The County Council has invested an additional £25 million to support Adult Social Care and Children's Services.

Children's Services

Unfortunately, the number of children coming into care is still increasing. We need more foster parents as we would rather place children in families than in residential homes. We have also invested in more social workers to provide more support for children and families to try to keep them together.

90% of Norfolk's schools are now judged as good or better by Ofsted.

We are going to receive an additional £2.7million, from the Department of Education, towards developing a new strategy to create more school places for children with special needs so that they can attend schools closer to their homes. This will reduce the high transport and placement costs.

Adult Services

We worked with community groups on a project called In Good Company to help reduce loneliness as it can lead to ill health and increase the demand on social care.

We have also recruited new care workers to help with reablement. This is a system that supports people coming out of hospital to ensure they can live safely and independently in their own home. It also helps reduce the delayed discharges from hospital and helps to free up availability of beds.

Public Health

Public Health have been doing a lot of work on suicide prevention and mental health via new ideas such as Creative Matters which was a partnership with the Theatre Royal which ran a series of workshops, performances and events focusing on men's health to help reduce the stigma surrounding mental health.

Norfolk has around 77 suicides per year, which is higher than the national average. It is often older men from farming communities who commit suicide. The campaign called, 'I am really (not) OK' aims to help people recognise their problem, talk about it, and accept help.

We have set up a new, confidential text messaging service called 'Chathealth' for 11 – 19 year olds to provide an easy way to talk to school nurses. Libraries also hold a section on health for teenagers. The number of teenage pregnancies in Norfolk is decreasing.

Staff who deal with the public are being trained to spot signs of domestic abuse and offer support.

Economy

We are looking at running several services from fewer buildings so have set up our own property company, called Repton Property Developments, to sell surplus property and reduce running costs.

Trading Standards

Trading Standards is inviting people to undertake training to protect their communities against scams. Some victims have lost many thousands but are often too embarrassed to tell people and obtain help. The Norfolk Against Scams Partnership wants to make people more alert to these dangers and encourage them to caution each other. Parish Councillors will be invited to undertake training.

Trading Standards is also keeping people, animals and businesses safe in other ways, eg. checking for illegal goods and substances. In 2017 they seized 160,000 illegal cigarettes.

Fire Service

Over the last year the Fire Service has attended 2037 fires, 748 road traffic collisions and 2300 special service incidents such as flooding, trapped people or animals, or assisting medical staff gain entry to premises.

Our Fire Service is one of the most economical in the country. At the moment the Police and Crime Commissioner is putting together a Business Case to try to show that the governance of the Fire Service should be transferred from Norfolk County Council to him.

Resilience

During the recent bad weather, the Beast from the East, snow storms etc., the Resilience team worked tirelessly with Highways, Fire Service and volunteers to rescue cars and people, keep roads clear and help with medical emergencies.

When others could not get in to work, staff who had been working overnight at the Fire Service call centre, and were snowed in, stayed on and worked another shift because of the high demand for their service.

The Resilience team also helped residents whose homes were in danger of falling into the sea at Hemsby and helped them find accommodation, rescue pets, deal with all aspects of the emergency.

Highways

We have just agreed this years' Parish Partnership Schemes which will enable villages to put in safety schemes such as flashing signs, footpaths, trods, wig-wags, and bus shelters. The scheme will be run again this year.

Work on the Northern Distributer Route from Postwick to the Fakenham is nearly completed and we are currently considering the best route to join it to the A47.

Agreed dualling for the A47 is on track with preparation work commencing this year. North Tuddenham to Easton dualling should begin in 2021 and there are also plans to improve the Thickthorn junction with the A11.

The EDP recently called a meeting to promote the dualling of the whole of the A47. The Minister for Roads and local MPs attended and promised to do what they could to assist. The EDP is working with NCC to get local people to complete postcards saying why they think it is essential to dual the whole of the A47. These will be delivered to the Government to emphasize the case.

We have a new Casualty Reduction Working Group which is looking at how we can improve safety on our roads and reduce the number of people killed or seriously injured.

Broadband

We are continuing to roll out Broadband across the county. It was originally agreed that the Better Broadband for Norfolk programme would provide 95% of Norfolk homes and businesses with access to high speed broadband by 2020. We think we may do better than this.

Mobile phones

The new Digital Innovation and Efficiency Committee is working to improve the quality and the coverage by putting masts on council-owned building to help overcome 'not spots'. The aim is to increase the county's mobile phone coverage to 98%.

Libraries

The Library and Information Service has won a national award called Libraries Change Lives for the second year running. Libraries have become Social Hubs providing scales for weighing babies, theatrical and musical performances and activities such as board games and knit and natter groups, as well as story telling for adults and children, to encourage social interaction and help combat

loneliness. They also run activities for people with dementia, help people with IT and run craft sessions.

A new Business and Intellectual Property hub has been set up at the Forum providing information for new businesses and people needing information on how to set up a business.

As usual we ran our annual Summer Reading Challenge for children, we repeated a new writing competition, Write On Norfolk, that we began last year for 5 – 13 year olds and we also began another new scheme, Count On Norfolk, to encourage children to practice their mathematical skills in a fun way during the holidays.

Libraries also received a grant from Arts Council England to train volunteers to coach residents, aged 8 and over, who were struggling to learn to read. Individual reading sessions have supported around 600 people and we are continuing to support new learners and volunteers.

We are gradually extending our Open Library service to more branches. This enables customers to access the library outside regular opening hours.

Museums

The museum service has continued to bring in grants which have enabled them to put on successful displays such as 'Nelson and Norfolk' and 'Rembrandt: lightening the darkness' and we have just begun the excavation of the Keep at the Castle Museum in Norwich in preparation for its transformation so that people can see what it looked in Norman times.

The Museum Service has also run many events for schools during term time and for families during school holidays.

Preparation for the future

This year the County Council is launching its new vision entitled "Caring for our County". This together with a new operational plan called Norfolk Futures hopes to find new ways to supply the increasing demand for services. The focus will be on demand management, prevention and early help. We are hoping much more can be done via IT or email as this is much cheaper than phone calls or letters. Committee papers are no longer posted out to members we have to find them on the website and all departments are looking at ways of delivering services more economically.

Parish Councils

I endeavour to attend all Parish Council meetings but occasionally I have to miss one due to another meeting elsewhere. Parish clerks know that they can contact me anytime if there is a problem in the area that I can help with.

Margaret Dewsbury