

Caring for our County

Annual Report from Barry Stone, County Councillor for the Loddon Division

2018/19 was a funny old year and one that I will want to forget in many ways. It started with me having to surrender my driving licence owing to a small seizure I had in January, this resulted in over six months unable to drive. As a consequence, I had to suspend attendance at Parish Council meetings, and I would like to thank you all for your kind thoughts and forbearance.

In May 2018 my wife Margaret was installed as Chairman of Norfolk County Council and as her consort I have been expected to accompany her to numerous functions both in Norfolk and other counties. This has further hampered my ability to attend Parish Councils on a regular basis and will continue until she is replaced on 7th May this year.

In July 2018 I was appointed Chairman of the Business and Property Committee and this has also been fairly time consuming although very rewarding. We are increasingly having to re-evaluate the buildings and property we own to ensure that if we need the buildings, what goes on inside them either works at capacity providing services or creates income to subsidise other services. Income generation has become essential in order to maintain our essential services including the sale of properties no longer required. I also have responsibility for the nearly 17,000 acres of County Farms which also need to generate more income for the council.

Once again, many thanks for your understanding and forbearance although it has not prevented me from being fully accessible via email or phone to help with any problems or queries you may have had.

I hope normal service will be resumed in the near future and I will once again be able to attend all Parish Councils on a more regular basis.

There follows a more formal roundup of the County Council's activities for the year ended March 2019.

Norfolk County Council Annual Report 2018/19

The 2019/20 budget

In February 2019 Norfolk County Council agreed a £409 million revenue budget for 2019-20. This budget is balanced, is robust and allocates our resources across Norfolk's people and communities in the best way we can, while protecting the frontline services the people of Norfolk rely on so dearly.

The Council's Government funding has reduced by a total of £204m between 2010/11 and 2018/19 and its revenue support grant will fall from £39m to zero in 2020/21. During this period, the council has made savings of £364m, including efficiency savings of £246m. This has resulted in the difficult but necessary decision to increase the County Council's share of Council Tax by 2.99% this year.

The key points of the budget are:

- A £409m net revenue budget – representing the Council Tax income which contributes to running the council and its services
- The Council's share of band D bills will rise to £1,362.24 from April.
- Savings of £31.6m in 2019/20, rising to a total of £79.4m over the next three years
- Examples of increased investment from April include £6m to address growing demand on adult social services, and £14.5m to tackle pressures on the looked-after children service

Caring for your infrastructure

£12.7m road improvement schemes nearing completion

In November 2018 Norfolk received an additional £12.694m from the Government to spend on road maintenance.

To date 125,000m² of worn out highway surface has been removed and replaced with 26,600 tonnes of brand new asphalt.

Funding success for Greater Norwich transport bid

Greater Norwich has been awarded £6.1m by the Department for Transport, following a successful bid in the first round of Transforming Cities funding.

Transport for Norwich put forward eight sustainable transport schemes and applied for a £7.3m contribution from the £60m pot. Of these, six were awarded money.

For more information about the project and full details of the newly-funded projects, please visit www.norfolk.gov.uk/transformingcities.

Delivering the Western Link

The County Council is proposing to create a Norwich Western Link to improve travel between the A47 and Broadland Northway (formerly the Northern Distributor Road) and tackle transport problems in the area.

The council published four shortlisted options for a Norwich Western Link - three new dual carriageway roads and a single carriageway upgrade to the B1535

The council is aiming to start construction on the Norwich Western Link in late 2022.

For more information about the project visit www.norfolk.gov.uk/nwl.

Norfolk ranked fourth in national highways and transport survey

Norfolk has been ranked fourth out of 28 similar councils in a national independent survey which looks at satisfaction with highways and transport services.

The highest scores for the county were for traffic levels and congestion, and the condition of roads and footpaths. These are all things that people consistently say are important to them and in which Norfolk is ranked strongly compared to other councils.

Altogether 113 local authorities signed up for the 2018 survey. Out of the 28 county councils and larger unitary authorities in the peer group, Norfolk ranked in the top 10 for:

- Condition of highways
- Highway maintenance
- Public transport info
- Ease of access (for disabled people)
- Local bus services
- Community transport
- Pavements and footpaths
- Cycle routes and facilities
- Traffic levels and congestion
- Management of roadworks
- Traffic management

Great Yarmouth Third River Crossing

Norfolk County Council has awarded the contract for Great Yarmouth's Third River Crossing to BAM Farrans – a joint venture between two construction industry leaders.

Following a competitive tender process, BAM Farrans will now be working with the project team at the county council to finalise the detailed design and construction requirements for the bridge.

So far, £98m of funding from the Department for Transport has been awarded to Norfolk County Council towards the anticipated £120m cost of the project.

For more information about the Third River Crossing, please visit www.norfolk.gov.uk/3rc.

£11m boost for broadband in Norfolk

Thousands more homes and businesses in Norfolk will be able to access Superfast Broadband thanks to Norfolk County Council securing an extra £11m funding.

Currently 92% of homes and businesses have access to download speeds of 24Mbps+ per second. The Better Broadband for Norfolk (BBfN) programme is set to deliver 95% coverage across the county by the end of March 2020, but the council is not content to stop there.

BBfN rollout started in July 2013 when 42% of Norfolk properties had access to Superfast broadband. The new contract is expected to be signed early this year (2019).

To find out if superfast broadband is available in your area, visit www.betterbroadbandnorfolk.co.uk.

Caring for your economy

Our approach to improving mobile phone signals recognised as national best practice

Norfolk County Council has received national praise in Parliament for its approach to improving mobile phone signals in the county.

The Council's Digital Innovation and Efficiency Committee commissioned a survey earlier this year on mobile signals across the county. The results were used to create an interactive map and more than 200 council owned sites have now been identified in areas of poor mobile reception. These are being offered to mobile operators as potential sites for new masts.

Full Fibre boost for Norfolk businesses

Norfolk County Council secured £8m from the UK Government Digital, Culture, Media & Sport department's Local Full Fibre Network (LFFN) fund.

The £8m funding is part of an £11m programme to upgrade more than 370 of Norfolk's public-sector buildings to the latest ultrafast connection speeds. It will enable 230 schools, 108 Norfolk County Council Corporate buildings (including 38 libraries) and 34 fire stations to be upgraded to gigabit (1,000 mbps) fibre internet connections within two years.

Norfolk businesses can also apply to a voucher scheme that will provide up to £2,500 per business to fund their connection and pay the first-year running costs.

Caring for your children and families

New Early Childhood and Family Service

This year we launched our new Early Childhood and Family Service. We believe this will have greater reach to those more isolated children and families in need of help and advice, through increased local support, easier to access information and crucial outreach work while continuing to deliver services previously offered.

This commitment means adapting the way we deliver services in response to the changing needs of Norfolk's children and young people. This transformative approach is one we are implementing across all our services.

We will be moving, not removing, some services into libraries, nurseries and community centres, alongside our 15 new service bases. Crucially, this more efficient use of infrastructure means money can be invested on delivering the services that we know are needed and valued by you to a greater number of children and young people, across Norfolk.

£120m investment special school places

Norfolk County Council will be investing £120m in special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) provision in the County

In March 2019 we secured Government funding of up to £17m to build a new 170 place school in the county for children aged 3-19 with complex needs.

We proposed plans to create more than 500 extra school places, in four new special schools plus specialist bases at mainstream schools.

We have approved an initial investment of £4.8m in the current financial year, to allow the first phase of work to begin as quickly as possible.

A new special school, specialising in social, emotional and mental health, is likely to be the first project to get underway. The school will be developed on the former Alderman Swindell School site, in Great Yarmouth.

New homes for care leavers open after £5m investment

The first of 11 homes for Norfolk's care leavers has opened this year, following £5m of investment from Norfolk County Council.

The County Council has worked with young people to make sure that the accommodation meets their needs and four of the homes are now finished.

When finished there will a total of 25-30 beds across the 11 properties.

Without the new properties the young people would need to live in residential care or in placements with another provider, at a cost of up to £6,500 per week. The new homes ensure they have the right support, are able to learn to live in communities in a supported way and reduce the overall cost to the Council.

Adult Social Care

New services to help ensure no lonely day in Norfolk

People affected by loneliness and social isolation in Norfolk can now turn to a comprehensive range of new services for help and support.

The new services include a county-wide network of "Life Connectors" who work directly with people to provide coaching, practical advice and support to help people make and maintain relationships and strong links within their community.

The new services include outreach, promoting volunteering opportunities and benefits, asset mapping and addressing rural issues such as transport and use of technology in order to support people to become and stay well-connected in their local area.

Celebrating the launch of the Carers Charter

The Carers Charter was launched on 30 November at County Hall.

The event coincided with Carers Rights Day, a national campaign which brings unpaid carers, organisations and local communities together to help carers understand their rights.

The adoption of the Charter by the County Council is a bold, innovative and radical move designed to improve the lives of carers. They constitute an enormous and largely hidden resource saving the public purse billions of pounds a year.

For more information visit carersmatternorfolk.org.uk

We are investing £29m in Housing with Care

This year we announced £29m capital investment scheme to deliver 3,000 extra homes for older people in Norfolk over the next ten years.

Norfolk requires 2,842 extra care units by 2028.

Increasing the provision of extra care housing to match future demand will deliver approximately £4m gross revenue saving per year.

The Living Well Homes for Norfolk Strategy and Position Statement can be found here (www.norfolk.gov.uk/livingwellhomes)