

## **County Council Report February 2026 – Judy Oliver**

### **County council elections**

On 22<sup>nd</sup> January, the Government announced that it had decided that this May's county council elections would not go ahead, so that the council can focus on local government reorganisation and devolution. This accompanies their decision to cancel the Mayoral Elections scheduled for May as well.

The Council agreed to delay the 2025 elections in order to secure the Government's devolution deal, based on the promise that a Mayor would be elected in 2026. That timetable was changed without warning in November 2025, delaying the Mayoral election until May 2028, despite the significant work already done locally to prepare. With hindsight, it is clear that the 2025 county elections could have gone ahead without affecting devolution. There is a judicial review of this decision in court on 19 February

### **Norfolk gritting**

Norfolk County Council's winter gritting is well underway, with gritters active on A/B roads, key bus routes, and village access roads, using new tech for efficiency. The first runs of the recent winter season (late 2025/early 2026) started as temperatures dropped, with the 58-strong fleet with automated salting to cover 2,200 miles of routes, supported by stocked salt barns and public grit bins.

Updates are posted on their social media using #NorfolkWinter, with a dedicated website for information. Residents can also check this year's gritting routes using the online map on the council's website

(<https://maps.norfolk.gov.uk/highways/maps/gritting.aspx>)

To report any gritting issues contact the Report a Highways Problem section on the Norfolk County Council website

(<https://www.norfolk.gov.uk/article/63696/Report-a-highways-problem>)

### **SEND Services**

The scale of the challenge facing SEND services is being driven by national policy decisions and long-standing underfunding. Successive Governments have expanded statutory duties on councils without providing the funding or system reform needed to deliver them sustainably. As a result, local authorities like Norfolk are left managing rising demand, workforce shortages and significant financial risk, while responsibility for fixing a broken national SEND system is effectively pushed down to the local level.

Norfolk County Council has repeatedly called for meaningful reform and fair, long-term funding to address the root causes of the SEND crisis. Without decisive action from Government, councils will continue to be placed in an impossible position, expected to deliver for families while operating within a system that is not fit for purpose.

### **Every 1p Rise in National Living Wage Costs Norfolk Council's Adult Social Care £300,000**

Norfolk County Council's Adult Social Services face significant and immediate cost pressures from changes to the National Living Wage, with every 1p increase adding around **£300,000** to the council's annual costs. These rising costs reflect the council's responsibility to fund care for some of the county's most vulnerable residents, where staffing makes up the largest proportion of provider expenditure.

While fair pay for care workers is essential and strongly supported, the scale and speed of national wage increases continue to place major financial strain on local authorities. Without matching increases in Government funding, councils are left to absorb these costs within already stretched budgets, reducing flexibility and increasing pressure on services at a time of growing demand.

### **15% uplift to foster carer pay proposed in transformation programme for council foster carers**

Foster carers will soon have 15% uplift in their pay, following Norfolk County Council investment of £1.5m annually in the fostering service.

The proposals include:

- A 15% uplift in fees for mainstream and kinship carers
- Additional uplifts for mainstream carers looking after children aged 10 and older
- Greater rewards for long service
- An expanded therapeutic support team
- Enhanced practical support

The proposals follow extensive engagement with carers as part of efforts to improve support and recruit more carers.

There is a national shortage of foster carers, including in Norfolk where there are several children currently living in residential care who could thrive with a fostering family. Research shows that living in a family environment is less traumatic and results in a much better outcome for a child in care. It also reduces costs for the local authority. A

residential care placement in Norfolk costs nearly £300,000 per year, compared with £45,000 per year for a foster home. An average of 5 children per week come into care in Norfolk.

### **Council to consider additional investment of £35m in Independent Living Programme**

Norfolk County Council is considering investing a further £35 million towards its Independent Living Housing Programme.

Since its launch in November 2018, the programme has contributed capital funding towards 603 high-quality, modern apartments designed for people aged 55 and over who want to stay independent in their local communities in later life.

Rising construction costs and new regulatory requirements have impacted delivery within the original £29 million capital budget. To enable delivery of the remaining 532 homes by the programme, NCC Cabinet is being asked to approve the additional funding. These homes will help save the council money every year by avoiding the need for people to move into residential care.

Identified demand for Independent Living housing in Norfolk reflects the ageing population, increasing prevalence of disability, and the growing number of residents wanting more independence in later life and seeking alternatives to traditional residential care.

### **Cabinet considers future of care homes**

A company that runs good and outstanding care facilities is interested in buying Norfolk County Council's care company and 20 homes.

If Norfolk County Council agrees a deal with Stow Healthcare, residents of the homes would continue to live there, and existing Norse Care staff would move to the new owner.

The council launched a review of its care estate last year, as its contract with Norse Care Ltd was due to end in March 2026.

Since the contract started in 2011, people's care needs have become more complex and most of the 20 care homes now require modernisation. Three of the homes have closed already but are being included in the proposed sale.

### **Body worn cameras aid safety in Norfolk**

Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service (NFRS) has rolled out 160 new Axon body-worn cameras across stations in Norfolk to help improve safety and decision-making at incidents. Cameras have been issued to all fire appliances and operational officers, as well as to protection and prevention teams, fire investigation officers, the training school, and Trading Standards officers.

The Axon devices provide live streaming, location data and two-way communication, allowing footage to be shared in real time with control room staff during emergency incidents. This supports quicker, better-informed decisions, improves firefighter safety by identifying risks earlier, and helps coordinate responses with partner agencies.

The cameras were introduced in December and have already recorded nearly 100 hours of footage across more than 500 video clips.