

Norfolk signs historic agreement with Ukrainian region of Lviv

A cooperation agreement has been signed between Norfolk County Council and the Ukrainian region of Lviv which is designed to explore knowledge transfer, educational exchange and trade opportunities.

The historic Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed on Thursday 2 May at the Ukrainian Embassy in London by Leader of Norfolk County Council Kay Mason Billig and in Lviv via video link by Maksym Kozytskyi, Head of the Lviv Regional Military Administration. It is the first such agreement to be signed with Lviv by any part of the UK.

Cllr Mason Billig was joined at the ceremony by Liz Truss MP, as the MP for for South West Norfolk, Cllr Fabian Eagle Cabinet Member for Economic Growth, Cllr Chris Dawson, Rural Champion, Chris Starkie, Director of Growth and Investment, and Roberta Willner, Head of Economic Development. Also there to witness the signing of the agreement was Nataliya Klymko, Programmes Coordinator for Growth and Investment.

Both Norwich and Lviv have links to UNESCO: Norwich is a UNESCO City of Literature, and the historic part of Lviv city (300-acre historic centre) is included in the UNESCO World Heritage list. In 2022, Lviv was granted Freedom of the City of Norwich in solidarity with Ukraine, and the MoU - similar to a twinning arrangement - will further celebrate and build on these links.

Norfolk and Lviv have identified several key opportunities for collaborative working, including the TechBridge programme, a strategic partnership between the UK Government, Ukraine Ministry of Digital Transformation and Ukraine Ministry of Foreign Affairs to forge connections between our tech ecosystems.

This partnership currently runs to 2025 but may be extended, providing businesses in both locations access to expert advice and support in navigating the barriers to UK-Ukraine trade. There are also specialist investment accelerator programmes for Ukraine tech SMEs looking to expand overseas.

The skills and knowledge the local Lviv tech sector offers are recognised on the international level. For example, Lviv IT specialists developed the Skype app and special effects for films such as Harry Potter and Spider-Man. Norfolk also has a strong growing ICT/Digital sector with several individual clusters, and the MoU will encourage collaboration within the sector between our regions by participating in mutual events of interest.

This not only benefits cluster growth in a key sector for Norwich and Norfolk's digital services and would benefit Lviv through the contribution to the recovery efforts.

Other opportunities for collaboration include an incoming visit to the Theatre Royal Norwich in October by the Lviv National Philharmonic Orchestra of Ukraine, led by leading conductor, Theodore Kuchar.

New grants to help Norfolk residents open for applications

Voluntary organisations who support people struggling with the cost of living in Norfolk can now apply for two new grants from Norfolk's Household Support Fund.

£2.15m of funding, from a combination of UK Government and Norfolk County Council sources, is being made available to Voluntary, Charity and Social Enterprises in Norfolk that are supporting those struggling with the cost of living.

Of this, £1.35m is available as part of a one-off grant funding pot that will enable community groups and social enterprises to meet the emergency needs of residents, particularly those at the highest risk of living in poverty and those who have higher than average costs due to specific needs such as care costs. Application for this Community Based Hardship Support Fund must be made by 31 May, with grants of £10,000 - £50,000 available.

Applications can be made online at: norfolkfoundation.com/funding-support/grants/groups/community-based-hardship-support-fund

In addition, £800,000 is being made available to organisations that are already supporting people in Norfolk, to help meet any emerging needs these individuals may have, such as help with the cost of food and energy. An applicant organisation can receive up to £20,000 to distribute to individuals in grants of up to £100 to help meet these costs. Applications for this funding, via the Norfolk Household Support Fund, are open until 30th September.

Applications can be made online at: norfolkfoundation.com/funding-support/grants/groups/norfolk-household-support-fund-5

Both schemes are being administered on behalf of Norfolk County Council by the Norfolk Community Foundation. Any voluntary, community or social enterprise which works to support Norfolk residents can now apply to either fund online.

The funding for these schemes comes from Norfolk's £7.135m Household Support Fund for April to September 2024, comprising £6.7m allocated by central government topped up with a further £435,000 from Norfolk County Council.

Between 2021 and September this year, a total of £43.485m will have been allocated to the Household Support Fund in Norfolk, comprising £40.2m from central government and £3.285m funded by Norfolk County Council.

Anyone in Norfolk struggling with living costs can also request support or advice via norfolk.gov.uk/costofliving or by calling 0344 800 8020.

Enjoy feel good events at this year's Creativity and Wellbeing Week

This national celebration returns for another week of events highlighting the power of creativity and culture to improve our health and wellbeing.

Creativity and Wellbeing Week runs from 20 - 26 May. In Norfolk, there's a great mix of in person and online events on offer from Norfolk County Council's libraries, adult learning, museums and record office, as well as local artists, arts and health partners.

A special free outdoor event at Sweet Briar Marshes offers a chance to experience art and nature. On our Doorstep is part of the Norfolk and Norwich Festival and is a series of artworks created in collaboration with local people and Norfolk Wildlife Trust. It runs from 13 May to 19 June, admission free.

Find out more and book your place at www.norfolk.gov.uk/getcreative

Creativity and Wellbeing Week is a partnership between London Arts and Health Forum and the Culture, Health & Wellbeing Alliance. It is an annual open festival and anyone who wants to host an event focused on culture, arts and wellbeing is encouraged to join in and contribute to the programme.

Four Norfolk teenagers sworn in as new Youth Parliament Members

Four Norfolk teenagers have been officially inaugurated as the county's new Members of Youth Parliament (MYPs) at a special ceremony held by Norfolk County Council.

Norfolk Youth Parliament helps young people to have a voice on the future of Norfolk and make a positive difference in their local community. Working with regional MPs and local Norfolk councillors, the young leaders will represent their peers and advocate for important issues such as education, mental health, and climate change.

Youth parliament elections are organised by Norfolk County Council and the young people will be supported by the council's participation team during their time in office.

The new MYPs are:

- Keyaan Ahmed for Norwich
- Beau Berwick for South Norfolk and Great Yarmouth
- Aiesha Page-Geeves for North Norfolk and Broadland
- Sophia Paffett for West Norfolk and Breckland

Four new deputies have also been elected:

- Rebecca Roberts for Norwich
- Tiarna Westward for South Norfolk and Great Yarmouth
- Daisy Keddie for North Norfolk and Broadland
- Sarah Mckown for West Norfolk and Breckland

The new MYPs, all aged between 13 and 18, were selected through a rigorous process that included applications, interviews, and public voting. Their passion for public service and dedication to their communities stood out throughout the selection process.

Councillor Penny Carpenter, Cabinet Member for Children's Services, said: "I'm delighted to be able to introduce our newly elected members of youth parliament. These young people put in a huge amount of effort, ran fantastic campaigns, and got thousands of votes from young people all across Norfolk.

"Youth parliament is a great opportunity for young people to use their voice for the greater good of their peers. It also helps inform key decision makers across the county, including ourselves at Norfolk County Council, so we can better meet the needs of children and young people."

The swearing-in ceremony was held at the Norfolk County Council chambers and was attended by council members, family, and friends of the new Members of Youth Parliament. The event highlighted the importance of youth participation in local governance and the role of the Youth Parliament in shaping the future of Norfolk.

A total of 16,345 votes were cast by 11 to 18-year-olds in Norfolk's MYP elections, approximately 21.5% of the population of young people in Norfolk and the largest paper vote for young people yet.

Young people also had the chance to cast their votes in the Make Your Mark ballot, which asks them to vote for the issues most important to them from a list of options. This year, health and wellbeing was voted as the most important issue to young people followed by culture, media, sport, jobs, the economy, and benefits.

If you would like to get involved with the new MYPs, please email ymp@norfolk.gov.uk

Council calls for more foster carers over Foster Care Fortnight

Five children in Norfolk come into care every week and Norfolk County Council is calling for more people to come forward to give them a loving home.

The council is using Foster Care Fortnight to urge more people to consider fostering and encourage more businesses to become foster friendly employers.

There are more than 1,200 children in care in Norfolk and, although numbers have stabilised in recent years, the council needs more carers to provide stability and safety for the children it looks after.

The council is encouraging businesses to become fostering friendly organisations, to make it easier for their staff to become carers.

Foster Friendly employers support their staff by giving them flexibility to take their foster child to medical appointments, attend parents' evenings and sports day, or to work from home if the child is sick.

Norfolk County Council has recently become accredited as a Fostering Friendly Employer and has 30 employees who are also foster carers with Norfolk Fostering Service. Foster carers are self-employed. Many continue working at their usual place of employment at the same time as being a foster carer.

National fostering charity, the Fostering Network, offers free advice and support for businesses considering becoming a fostering friendly employer. It's completely free to do, and involves a willingness to support foster carers, and some changes to your HR policy to set out the support you will offer.

For more details see [The Fostering Network's page about Fostering Friendly](#).

Norfolk County Council appointed to lead Music Hubs for Norfolk and Suffolk

Norfolk County Council has been appointed by Arts Council England to lead both the Norfolk and Suffolk Music Hub from September 2024, as part of an ambitious national programme to provide high-quality music education for all children and young people.

Norfolk County Council's Music Service has led the Norfolk Music Hub, a partnership of organisations and schools which engage with Norfolk's children and young people in music making, since 2012.

The Arts Council England funds Music Hubs across the country, on behalf of the Department for Education (DfE). It has decided to reduce the number of Music Hubs across England from 118 to 43, including a combined hub for Norfolk and Suffolk. Norfolk has won the bid to lead this hub.

As the new Hub Lead Organisation for both counties, Norfolk County Council will receive just over £2m from the DfE to coordinate music education, plus £661,967 to invest in new musical instruments, equipment and technology tailored to the needs of children and young people in Norfolk, including those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

The council will deliver high quality music education accessible to all children and young people in Norfolk and Suffolk through diverse partnerships between educational, creative and community organisations, in their local communities and throughout the country.

Have your say and help Norfolk make more space for nature

Norfolk County Council, along with 47 other local authorities, is working on a Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) as part of a national effort to protect biodiversity in England.

We launched a survey on 13 May to find out which aspects of nature are most important to people in Norfolk which will help to ensure the strategy represents local views.

The survey, which is open for the next seven weeks, will ask residents which aspects of nature are most important to them, where their favourite places to visit in the county are and how easy it is to get there.

The survey will also seek opinions on which habitats and species should be included in the strategy - but you don't have to be a wildlife expert! Answers will help the council understand what most people think about nature in Norfolk.

By taking part in the survey residents will contribute to the process of creating this incredibly important strategy. Nationwide, wildlife species have declined by 19% since 1970 but luckily here in Norfolk we have more protected spaces for nature than elsewhere. However, these spaces are in isolated pockets that need improving and linking together, protecting them for future generations to enjoy.

The 48 strategies being created across England will be put together to form a national 'nature network', with each strategy highlighting the most important local habitats and the best places for new habitat to be created.

As well as making more space for nature, this strategy has a wide range of benefits for residents, landowners and businesses. For example,

- The creation of additional coastal habitats can assist communities in adapting to sea-level rise, safeguarding homes and businesses.
- New green spaces for recreation, such as woodlands, can improve health and wellbeing outcomes for nearby residents.
- Supporting farmers to manage their land for nature can bring new funding into the rural economy, generating employment and training opportunities. (a survey for farmers and landowners will be launched in the next four weeks)

Residents can take part in the survey online until Sunday 30 June.
Visit www.norfolk.gov.uk/LNRSpubliCSurvey for more information.

Home Composting promoting during Compost Awareness Week

To mark Compost Awareness Week (6 - 12 May), Norfolk County Council is encouraging people who are interested in home composting but haven't yet started to give it a try.

To learn how to compost at home visit www.norfolkrecycles.com/home-compost. To get your cut-price compost bin, visit www.getcomposting.com, call 0800 316 445 or buy one at your local recycling centre.