

12/12/24

Norfolk County Council updates

Make next Christmas a family Christmas for a child in care

As the festive period gets under way, councils from across the region are asking people to open their homes and hearts and make next Christmas a family Christmas for a child in care.

In Norfolk there are currently 1,200 children in care. Norfolk County Council is the largest fostering agency in Norfolk, with more than 300 foster families working with the Norfolk Fostering Service. There is an urgent need for more foster carers so that every child in care can live in a family home.

If anyone is interested in finding out more about becoming a foster carer and what is involved, further information and links are available [here](#).

Increased passenger satisfaction on Norfolk's buses

Investment and enhancements have led to increased passenger satisfaction on Norfolk's buses.

A recent independent survey through Transport Focus found that overall bus passenger satisfaction in Norfolk has increased by 6% with 87% of passengers satisfied with their journey. That puts Norfolk above the England average of 83%. Norfolk improved in all areas of satisfaction with the biggest improvements being in punctuality and value for money.

The number of people choosing to use the bus also continues to grow with almost 7 million passenger journeys for the second quarter of the year (May, June, July). That's a 12% increase compared to the same quarter last year.

The improvements are now set to continue with Norfolk County Council being awarded another £15.9 million from Government last month to spend in 2025/26. The funding is a mix of capital and revenue. The council is working with the Enhanced Partnership (of Norfolk County Council and Norfolk local bus operators) and stakeholders to decide where the money should be spent.

Norwich Castle Keep transformation update

The dismantling of the tower crane on the Castle mound marked a significant milestone in the Royal Palace Reborn project at Norwich Castle Museum. Inside the Keep, work to transform the space into a Norman palace is also making great progress as the project enters its final few months.

On the principal floor, recreated Norman spaces are now structurally complete. The Great Hall, the banqueting space of Norman royalty, has now been divided from the other rooms as the arches of the Victorian spine wall have been infilled. Additional walls to create the Chapel and King's Chamber have also been completed and new floor levels inserted, re-establishing lost mezzanines.

Together these will enable visitors to explore the original layout of the Keep as it would have appeared when building work was finished by William the Conqueror's son, Henry I, in 1121. Construction work is due to be completed and the Keep fully open in spring 2025.

Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service Award

Norfolk Fire & Rescue Service staff have won a national Collaboration of the Year in the Excellence in Fire and Emergency Awards at an event in London. They beat strong contenders from across the country to scoop this prestigious award.

Judges praised the innovative partnership they have with East of England Ambulance Service NHS Trust which enables firefighters at eight fire stations to respond to patients in cardiac

arrest, where they are able to arrive more quickly than ambulance colleagues. The stations involved are in areas considered to be in highest need of this service due to the demographics of population or rural locations.

This co-responding work means that fire crews can start CPR if they arrive before an ambulance, with every second proving vital in increasing survival rates. You can read more about the project [in the release prepared before the awards](#). (NB Aylsham is also now part of the project).

The thriving Hunstanton fire cadet unit was also shortlisted in the Youth Champion of the Year category at the awards, which are organised by Fire magazine. You can find out more about fire cadet units in Norfolk [here](#).

Norfolk schools awarded grants to support active travel initiatives

Earlier this year 10 schools across Norfolk received a £5,000 grant to pilot Norfolk County Council's Active Travel Survey. The scheme, which has been funded using money received from Active Travel England, aims to support schools with introducing new active travel and road safety initiatives for pupils.

The initiative which was open to all schools across the county received 74 applications. Following a review by the Active Travel Team and Road Safety Team 10 applications were chosen at random to receive the funding.

The aim is to help more staff, pupils, and families adopt active travel options like walking, cycling, or scooting for school journeys. It also is hoped that they will encourage schools to review their policies and safety plans to foster a lasting culture of active travel and road safety.

Further information, including examples of how the grant is being used, is available [here](#).

National updates

Bird Flu (avian influenza) government update, new cases in Norfolk

A new outbreak of Avian Flu (HPAI) H5N5 was confirmed in England on the 5 November 2024 and the first case of HPAI H5N1 was confirmed in England on the 17 November 2024.

On 10 December 2024, [Defra and the Animal and Plant Health agency update](#) said that HPAI H5N1 has been confirmed in commercial poultry at a premises near Dereham, and that following further testing at a second premises near Watton, avian influenza H5N1 has been confirmed.

All poultry on the premises have been humanely culled. A 3km protection zone and 10km surveillance zone have been put in place surrounding these premises.

Guidance on how to prevent bird flu and stop it spreading is available [here](#).

Planning Reforms

The government has [announced a major overhaul of the planning system](#) to accelerate housebuilding and deliver their target of delivering 1.5 million homes over this Parliament.

This includes new publications and requirements as outlined below. This member update has been written on the day of the announcements – ahead of any further analysis or implications

National Planning Framework proposed reforms and updates

On 12 December 2024, the government published [updates to the national planning framework](#). The framework has been revised in the light of the simultaneously published government [response to their consultation](#) about their proposed reforms. The framework sets out the government's planning policies for England and how these are expected to be applied.

The [online searchable version of the revised National Planning Policy Framework](#) is also now available, in addition to [planning practice guidance](#) to support the framework.

Key requirements under the new planning rules, updated via the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) include:

- Councils will be told to play their part to meet housing need, with new immediate mandatory housing targets for councils to ramp up housebuilding and deliver growth across the country putting more money in working people's pockets.
- Areas with the highest unaffordability for housing and greatest potential for growth will see housebuilding targets increase, while stronger action will ensure councils adopt up-to-date local plans or develop new plans that work for their communities.
- A new common-sense approach will be introduced to the greenbelt. While remaining committed to a brownfield first approach, the updated NPPF will require councils to review their greenbelt boundaries to meet targets, identifying and prioritising lower quality 'grey belt' land.
- Any development on greenbelt must meet strict requirements, via the new 'golden rules', which require developers to provide the necessary infrastructure for local communities, such as nurseries, GP surgeries and transport, as well as a premium level of social and affordable housing.
- To further tackle the housing crisis, councils and developers will also need to give greater consideration to social rent when building new homes and local leaders have greater powers to build genuinely affordable homes for those who need them most.

The government also outlined their Golden rules

- Brownfield first.
- Grey belt second.
- Affordable homes.
- Boost public services and infrastructure.
- Improve genuine green spaces.

Planning reform working paper

The government have published further details related to planning in a [planning reform working paper](#), part of a series of papers on different aspects of planning reform to inform further policy development in collaboration with the wider sector.

Under the new proposals, applications that comply with local development plans could bypass planning committees entirely as part of the "fast track" element of the reforms.

The paper proposes options for change to planning committees in England that they say would support a plan-led system. These include:

1. a national scheme of delegation
2. a new system of targeted committees for strategic development
3. mandatory training for committee members.

Additionally, local planning officers would have an enhanced decision-making role to implement agreed planning policy.

All three proposed reforms would require changes to primary legislation through the Planning and Infrastructure Bill.

A series of questions are posed at the end of the paper, to inform discussions with the sector before determining whether any of these proposals are taken forward.

The government welcomes responses to the questions in the paper but says this is not a formal consultation, it intended to inform discussions with the sector, to determine whether and how to take these proposals forward. There is no formal deadline for responses.

Government to tackle NHS workforce crisis with refreshed plan

The government and NHS will unveil a refreshed workforce plan in the summer with a laser focus on shifting care from hospitals and into the community, as we work to get the NHS back on its feet and fit for the future.

The Government's refreshed plan is likely to focus on access to GPs and hospital consultants for patients and mentions moving care to the community but has not yet set out how it intends to bolster care sector capacity to take this forward. The Government bases the need for a refreshed workforce plan based on the Darzi report, which made clear that NHS outcomes were poor despite record levels of funding into the system.

The government says it is taking the action needed to ensure it has the right workforce in the right place at the right time to deliver its 10 Year Health Plan which is due out next spring.

Funding to secure expansion to early years education

The Government has announced that it will deliver over [£2 billion in extra funding to early years providers](#) compared to the previous year, in order to deliver 30 hours of education per child to increase readiness for school.

The funding follows the Government's mission to break the link between background and opportunity, announced by the Prime Minister at his "milestones" speech on 5 December. The milestone concerns giving children the best start in life, with a record 75% of five-year-olds in England ready to learn when they start school

Alongside confirmation of the rates, today the government has announced a new £75 million expansion grant, to be allocated later this year, to support nurseries, childminders and other providers to deliver the 35,000 additional staff and 70,000 places required to meet demand for next September

Recycling waste electricals

Circular Economy Minister Mary Creagh has [announced](#) that online marketplaces and vape producers will soon be paying their fair share towards the cost of recycling waste electricals, from toasters to vapes and hair curlers, levelling the playing field for UK retailers.

Under the plans, online marketplaces will need to register with the Environment Agency and report data on UK sales of their overseas sellers. This data will be used to calculate the financial contribution the online marketplace will make towards the costs of collection and treatment of waste electricals that are collected by local authorities and returned to retailers.

The cost of that annual registration will be subject to a consultation led by the Environment Agency.