

## **Climate Change Strategy - action plan update**

In June 2023, Norfolk County Council launched its Climate Strategy. The strategy sets out how the council can address its own carbon footprint as well as its role in supporting Norfolk's low carbon development and green growth. The strategy received widespread support for its detailed coverage of how the council can help shape Norfolk's response to climate change in line with the local context and priorities. Moreover, the council's approach to climate was independently ranked second among the UK's County Councils in the [2023 Council Climate Action Scorecards](#).

On 13 March 2024 the Infrastructure and Development Committee discussed the third tranche of actions to deliver the climate change strategy.

The committee reviewed and commented on the climate strategy that is to go to cabinet, endorsed the inclusion of the council's vehicle fleet carbon into their estate definition (and hence within their 2030 net zero estate target), and requested cabinet to consider producing a climate policy for council to include in the policy framework later this year.

The actions will support low carbon transport, climate adaptation, and decarbonisation of local business and industry. Initiatives include:

- A pilot to develop a sustainable and viable seaweed industry in Norfolk - the project will work with partners in the Netherlands, already implementing sea farms.
- Supporting the development of nature-based solutions to help secure Norfolk's long term water resilience.
- Further walking and cycling improvements in places including King's Lynn, Norwich, Great Yarmouth, and Dereham.

Read the Infrastructure and Development Committee report [here](#) or watch the meeting [here](#).

## **Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service**

Improvements at Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service (NFRS) are evident with positive progress in many areas, according to an inspection report published 8 March.

His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabularies and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) found NFRS had improved in five key areas since its full inspection in 2021.

The March 2024 report is an assessment of the service's effectiveness and efficiency, and how well it looks after its people. The report recognised the service's sound financial management, positive working culture, and the high priority it gives fire prevention.

Inspectors found NFRS is good at understanding risk, responding to major and multi-agency incidents, and ensuring the affordability of its services now and in the future.

In recognition of the progress made, the previous 'cause for concern' related to preventing fires and risks has been removed with the service improving its rating from 'inadequate' in this area to 'requires improvement'.

Particular praise was given for 'promising practice' in significant incident and multi-agency fatal fire reviews, which are improving outcomes both locally and nationally.

Inspectors recognised the direction of travel on improvements, but said it needs to do more on assurance for the quality of its prevention and protection work, more on training, more to improve diversity in its workforce, and more on identifying and developing leaders.

People can find out more about NFRS on the County Council website [here](#) and access the full HMICFRS report [here](#).

### **First Bus completes transformation to all-electric bus fleet**

First Bus is celebrating the completion of the project to transform its Roundtree Way Depot to an all-electric commercial bus fleet.

By the end of March, the depot will be the operational centre for 59 double deck and 11 single deck brand new state-of-the-art electric buses.

This is not only the East of England's first zero-emission bus fleet but it is also the first complete zero-emission commercial bus fleet in England located outside of London.

The introduction of the new bus fleet means that over half of the Norwich network operated by First Bus is now electric.

The new electric vehicles produce zero tailpipe emissions, thus contributing towards our ambitions to run a net-zero transport system in Norfolk. They are great for the environment and Norwich's many residents and visitors, as they will help to create a cleaner, greener environment for people to live, work and enjoy. They also offer customers a more comfortable ride, as they are quieter and smoother than diesel vehicles.

The total investment made in the infrastructure and buses was £37.2 million. This comprises £14.7 million of Zero Emission Bus Regional Areas Government funding, bid for and won with Norfolk County Council, and a capital investment of £22.5 million from First Bus.

### **Public Information: Next of Kin appeal**

The Norfolk Coroner's Service are appealing for help to trace the family of a man who died at his home address.

Mark Preston, 49 years old, lived at an address in Woodside Road, Norwich and died on 4 March 2024. There were no suspicious circumstances and despite carrying out extensive enquiries no next-of-kin have been identified.

Anyone with information relating to Mark Preston should contact the Coroner's office in Norwich on 01603 774773 or email [coroner.referral@norfolk.gov.uk](mailto:coroner.referral@norfolk.gov.uk)

### **Government updates**

#### **Community Ownership Fund: Round 4 update**

The Community Ownership Fund has published the prospectus and guidance for Round 4, the final round of the fund. This fund helps community groups buy or renovate assets that would otherwise be lost to the community.

- Capital funding available: Up to £2 million for all asset types, but most awards will be for up to £250,000 of capital funding.
- Revenue funding available: No more than £50,000 or 20% of the total capital funding applied for, whichever is smaller. All groups are encouraged to apply for revenue funding, as all projects will incur initial running costs.

Round 4 Prospectus available [here](#).

Additional government guidance available [here](#).

Development support is also now available to applicants via the [My Community website](#). They will also be providing informative webinars on the following topics which you can register for now:

- [How to create a strong Community Ownership Fund application](#)
- [How to raise match funding for your Community Ownership Fund project](#)

## **NHS blood pressure campaign**

The NHS has launched a [new national campaign](#) to find the ‘missing millions’ who have undiagnosed high blood pressure. The campaign is backed by the British Heart Foundation, Stroke Association, Heart Research UK, Blood Pressure UK, May Measurement Month, British Society for Heart Failure, and more.

High blood pressure, often described as a ‘silent killer’, affects an estimated 32% of adults. As the condition rarely has any symptoms, approximately 3 in 10 of these remain undiagnosed, equating to 4.2 million people in England.

The Government’s campaign is encouraging individuals to get a blood pressure test, which is fairly easy and can be done at [participating pharmacies](#).

High blood pressure can be a sign of underlying health issues but is often treatable through improved diet and regular exercise. As such, NCC’s other health and wellbeing programmes are linked to this health outcome and can help support positive outcomes for wider public health goals.

Visit the NHS website for information about [things that can increase your risk of getting high blood pressure](#), as well as diagnosis, treatment and lifestyle changes.

## **Ofsted Consultation – the Big Listen launched**

Ofsted’s Chief Inspector has promised transparency and openness as they work to rebuild and strengthen the confidence of professionals and the public. He says Ofsted’s recent [response to the Education Select Committee](#) is an important moment to demonstrate their commitment to these principles.

As part of Ofsted’s wish to improve, they have launched the Big Listen Consultation. The consultation seeks views across their work, from schools and children’s social care to teacher training and early years.

They are seeking views about Ofsted’s work from the full range of professionals and providers with whom they work, as well as from parents, carers, children and learners.

They want to explore 4 key themes:

- How Ofsted reports on its findings

- How Ofsted carries out inspections
- How Ofsted can have a positive impact in all the sectors it inspects
- What Ofsted needs to do to be a world-class inspectorate and regulator, trusted by parents, children and the sectors it works with

Ofsted say the consultation is structured to allow you to provide feedback on the areas of greatest interest and importance to you.

The Big Listen consultation survey is available [here](#).

Ofsted will launch a strand of the consultation specifically aimed at children, including those in the care system, later this month.

The consultation closes on 31 May 2024.

### **Council tax premium for empty homes**

A strengthened 100% council tax premium on long term empty homes comes into force on 1 April 2024, with local councils able to spend the money from April 2025.

The government says the sharpened rules to double council tax on long term empty properties will support local people in areas where high numbers of empty homes are preventing them from finding affordable housing. The rules will apply when a property has been empty for 12 months, rather than the current two years.

Following [consultation feedback](#), a very limited number of exceptions have been set out. These will apply to empty properties that are uninhabitable due to extensive renovation, second homes that are not available for use year-round due to planning restrictions or for up to a year on homes that have been inherited to prevent families who are grieving from having to pay.

This announcement follows previous reforms to give councils greater power to control short-term lets by making them subject to the planning process, which can help to protect people from being pushed out of their local area, and announcements in the Spring Budget that furnished holiday lettings will have their tax relief scrapped.

If I can be of any further assistance please do not hesitate to contact me.

Kind regards

james