

Schools building inspections

Norfolk County Council is commissioning inspections of 37 more school buildings, as a precaution, following concerns about damage to some school ceilings.

The council started inspecting some schools at the beginning of the academic year after it was notified by Synergy Education Trust about issues involving lath and plaster ceilings at some of its schools.

The material alone is not a cause for concern, but ceilings may be at risk of collapsing if the lath and plaster is damaged.

Twenty-three schools were identified for urgent visits at the beginning of term - these were schools where the council knew that the material was present. Although the council regularly inspects maintained school buildings, damage can be difficult to spot on a visual inspection in suspended ceilings, so further urgent surveys were requested.

It is expected that more schools in Norfolk will be found to have damaged ceilings as safety inspections continue.

The council has risk assessed all of the schools it is responsible for maintaining.

A full list of the schools being investigated is available on the council website [here](#).

Academy trusts are responsible for the maintenance of their buildings, so the council has also written to academy trusts recommending that they check their ceilings. The council has also notified the DfE of the issue.

Norfolk Museums Service news

Norfolk Museums Service (NMS) has been chosen as one of eight leading museums to receive a share of a £1million investment from Art Fund and Nesta for a new cultural innovation project, 'Mini Wonders', supporting young children and families.

Working with the Nesta team and leading academics, the eight lead museums will contribute to the creation of a fun and engaging prototype programme for parents and caregivers and their children aged 2-4 years old and will bring this to life using museum spaces and collections. The ambition is that the research and development process will help to create a robust and well-evidenced programme with the potential to scale to more museums across the UK, while remaining unique to each museum and embedded in their community.

The Norfolk project will be led by Norwich Castle Museum & Art Gallery which has in the last few years been developing its Early Years programmes as part of the 'Norwich Castle: Royal Palace Reborn' project supported by National Lottery players through The National Lottery Heritage Fund. In the second phase of the project, Castle staff will roll out the learning to a partner NMS museum, who will develop and deliver programmes to three cohorts of early years families from their local area.

Major exhibition at Norwich Castle: JMW Turner and changing visions of landscape

A major new exhibition will explore artists' approach to landscape from the 17th century to the present day.

Opening to the public on Saturday 19 October 2024 at Norwich Castle Museum & Art Gallery, JMW Turner and changing visions of landscape places the work of arguably the world's most famous landscape artist at the heart of an exhibition which traces the evolution of landscape art before and after this pivotal figure.

On display until 23 February 2025, the exhibition at Norwich Castle kick starts celebrations for the 250th anniversary of Turner's birth in 1775.

In total over 70 works by more than 40 artists will be on display in the exhibition which is supported by the East Anglia Art Fund and WSP

The exhibition is a fitting celebration of the acquisition of Turner's 'Walton Bridges' by Norfolk Museums Service in 2019 following a successful fundraising campaign to save the painting for the nation. Supported by major grants of £2.1m from National Lottery players through The National Lottery Heritage Fund and from Art Fund, the acquisition was the first oil painting by Turner to enter a public collection in Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex.

The exhibition will be free with general admission. For further information and to book tickets visit: norwichcastle.norfolk.gov.uk

A full events programme will accompany the exhibition.

National updates

Care Minister priorities – Adult social care winter letter

Minister of State for Care, Stephen Kinnock MP, [has written to local authorities](#), Integrated Care Boards (ICBs) and care providers setting out his priorities for improving service resilience over the winter.

The letter sets out principles for winter preparation and priorities for improving service resilience in the short term, ahead of and during the winter period.

- a 'home first' approach that supports people to live independently for as long as possible
- a relentless focus on ensuring high-quality care
- close involvement of people receiving care and their families and carers

The letter complements messages set out in the recent letter that [NHS England has written to integrated care boards \(ICBs\) and NHS provider organisations](#), confirming their priorities for winter planning and preparedness.

Together, these letters reinforce the importance of an ongoing joined-up approach to planning across the health and care system - which we have in Norfolk through our [Health and Wellbeing Board](#) and the Norfolk and Waveney Integrated Care System.

The future of employment support

Minister for Employment, Alison McGovern MP [gave a speech](#) at the launch of 'Working for the Future', the final report of the Commission on the Future of Employment Support.

[The commission's report](#) finds that overall, the share of people in the labour force is now the lowest that it has been since 1998, driven by fewer young people in work, more older people out of work and more people off with long-term health conditions.

It argues for far-reaching reforms to help reverse significant falls in labour force participation, address insecurity and poverty in work, and tackle long-standing inequalities in the labour market.

The Minister said that life changing support would be provided through the governments reforms to get Britain working and a shift to policies that would break down barriers to opportunity, tackle the root causes of inactivity and help deliver the government's ambition to reach an 80% employment rate.

She said that 'A Get Britain Working Again White Paper', to be set out in the Autumn, will outline plans to overhaul jobcentres, deliver a youth guarantee, and devolve powers to Mayors and local areas to deliver work, health, and skills plans.

New Towns Taskforce update

The New Towns Taskforce has met for the first time. It has been asked to recommend locations for new towns within the next year to help boost economic growth and deliver new homes.

The New Towns Taskforce is an independent expert advisory panel established in September 2024 to support the government to deliver the next generation of new towns.

The primary objective of the new towns programme is to create new and expanded places and thereby boost economic growth and the supply of new homes – spreading opportunity and supporting strong communities. New towns will be located on large sites that provide significantly more homes, with 10,000 new homes the minimum.

The Taskforce, headed by Sir Michael Lyons, will report to the Deputy Prime Minister and meet on a monthly basis. It will be supported in full by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and by Homes England, as well as civil servants across all government departments and agencies.

Further information about the taskforce, including a list members and the taskforce terms of reference are available [here](#).

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

Kind regards

james