

Norfolk County Council updates

05/12/24

Give a Christmas gift to Norfolk's young people in supported living

People across Norfolk are being invited to give a gift this Christmas to 16 to 18-year-olds in supported living as part of Norfolk County Council's Christmas Appeal.

More than 100 young people in Norfolk live in supported accommodation and they can often spend Christmas alone, without their families. Organised by the Children's Services Department, this campaign aims to give every child in supported living in Norfolk a gift, ensuring that young people have at least one present to open this Christmas.

The Christmas Collection campaign has been running for several years and gives the people of Norfolk the chance to show how much they care by donating gifts and vouchers to young people living in supported accommodation.

People can give via physical gifts that can be dropped off at Norfolk Libraries during opening hours, or digitally by purchasing hampers from Norfolk Jar Company or shopping vouchers from stores such as Boots, Primark, Sports Direct and Tesco. Physical gifts need to be stocking filling type items such as toiletries, gift sets, socks, blankets, small games, hats, gloves, and sweet treats.

The deadline for donations is Saturday 14 December. This gives the collection time to sort and distribute gifts and vouchers before Christmas.

More information on the campaign and how to make a donation can be found [here](#).

Digital Services award winner: Norfolk County Council for Tech Skills for Life

Norfolk County Council has received more national recognition, as the Digital Services Team's Tech Skills for Life project won the Digital Inclusion category at the Smarter Working Live awards, hosted by the Government Property Agency (GPA) in partnership with GovNews. The GPA Smarter Working Live Awards recognise and celebrate outstanding examples of innovation, creativity and dedication to smarter working across the public sector.

[Tech Skills for Life](#) is a partnership led by Norfolk County Council, working with the NHS and a range of volunteer groups and local community organisations, to make sure everyone can use technology and access essential online services if they want to. The project offers wraparound support to empower less confident or capable residents to engage with technology and is also a means of social engagement for those in rural areas.

The project was piloted in West Norfolk and it is now being expanded to cover North Norfolk and Great Yarmouth areas. Coaches operate in trusted community spaces, such as libraries, to help residents gain digital skills and confidence and support them to access devices.

The recognition from GPA is great for Norfolk's reputation and profile, but most importantly, this innovative work has made a genuine difference to the quality of life for thousands of Norfolk residents.

Funding for Dentistry School

The Greater Norwich Growth Board has unanimously agreed to progress this project to the next stage, recommending £1.5 million is allocated to support the delivery of a new School of Oral Health at the University of East Anglia. This represents a significant step towards addressing the lack of NHS dentist capacity in Norfolk.

Further information is available [here](#).

Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service – defibrillators for public use

Lifesaving defibrillators for use by the public are now available at more than half of Norfolk's fire stations, thanks to the extension of a successful project.

Defibrillators give a high energy shock to the heart of people in cardiac arrest and are available in many public buildings. The number of fire stations across Norfolk with defibrillators has been increased from 10 to 22 fire stations.

The machines are simple to use and offer step by step guidance to enable people to try and restart a heart. The defibrillators have been provided by East of England Ambulance Service NHS Trust, local parish councils and Cromer crematorium.

Further information about this initiative is available [here](#).

You can find your nearest defibrillator using [Defib finder](#).

Norfolk and Waveney Integrated Care System: Flu and Covid vaccinations

In a coordinated campaign across the East of England, NHS organisations in the region are urging people eligible for a free flu or Covid vaccination to get protected in time for Christmas.

Over three million flu and Covid vaccinations have been delivered in the East of England. However, these numbers are down on last year and there are still more people they need to reach to make sure everyone is protected. The NHS wants to reach those people who haven't yet had their jabs with messages of 'now is the perfect time to get vaccinated' and 'don't put it off'.

The NHS offers free flu and COVID vaccines to many groups, including:

- Those aged 65 and over
- Those under 65 with long-term health conditions
- People who care for an older or disabled person
- Pregnant women
- Health and social care workers.

For more information on how to book your vaccination, visit www.nhs.uk/wintervaccinations.

National updates

Prime Minister's Plan for Change

On 5 December, the Prime Minister outlined his plan for doing government differently and to forward his Mission-led government.

The Prime Minister's [Plan for Change](#) sets out his milestones for delivery, with a focus on raising living standards, rebuilding Britain, ending hospital backlogs, putting police back on the beat, giving children the best start in life, and securing home-grown energy. He says these will be underpinned by his foundations of good government; economic stability, border security, national security.

The Government's Plan for Change priorities, commitments and milestones include:

- Raising living standards in every part of the UK so working people have more money in their pocket as they aim to deliver the highest sustained growth in the G7.
- Building 1.5 million homes in England and fast-tracking planning decisions on at least 150 major economic infrastructure projects.

- Ending hospital backlogs to meet the NHS standard of 92% of patients in England waiting no longer than 18 weeks for elective treatment.
- Putting police back on the beat with a named officer for every neighbourhood, and 13,000 additional officers, PCSOs and special constables in neighbourhood roles in England and Wales.
- Giving children the best start in life, with a record 75% of 5-year-olds in England ready to learn when they start school.
- Securing home-grown energy, protecting billpayers, and putting us on track to at least 95% Clean Power by 2030, while accelerating the UK to net zero.

The Prime Minister also pledged to reform government, aiming to make it more dynamic, innovative and efficient. He outlined an approach that included:

- A forthcoming Planning and Infrastructure Bill to accelerate major projects.
- Leveraging artificial intelligence to modernise public services.
- Increasing accountability within Whitehall by adopting measurable targets.
- A zero-based approach to the next Spending Review in spring, to look at every line of government spending to prioritise yet first steps and the milestones

Funding for SEND places in mainstream schools

The Government has [announced a £740 million funding package](#) to increase the number of places for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) in England.

The funding can be used to adapt classrooms to be more accessible for children with SEND, and to create specialist facilities within mainstream schools that can deliver more intensive support adapted to suit the pupils' needs.

The funding forms part of a broader £6.7 billion capital settlement for education for the next financial year, announced at the Autumn Budget, which will be used to deliver the government's mission to break down barriers to opportunity and give every child the best life chances while fixing the foundations of the school system.

Allocations will be confirmed in the Spring, alongside the publication of guidance outlining how councils can use this investment to improve local mainstream provision.

Public ownership: railway passenger services

The [Passenger Railway Services \(Public Ownership\) Bill](#) received Royal Assent on 28 November 2024, the Act brings passenger services into public ownership as a first step towards wider rail reform. The transition to a publicly owned railway is intended to improve reliability and support the government's priority of boosting economic growth by encouraging more people to use the railway.

On 4 December the [Secretary of State for Transport launched the programme](#) to transition rail services currently in private ownership into public ownership.

Services currently operated by South Western Railway, and c2c will be the first to transfer into public ownership when their national rail contracts expire on 25 May 2025 and 20 July 2025 respectively.

Greater Anglia's services will be next to transfer in autumn 2025. The government will issue an expiry notice to Greater Anglia in due course to confirm the exact transfer date.

The government says it's first priority is ensuring the transition process is thorough and delivers the best outcomes for passengers. They say that allowing several months lead-in to each transfer will ensure there will be no adverse impact on passengers during this time. Passengers will still be able to purchase their tickets as before, and tickets bought before the transfer date for travel will continue to be valid.