

Councillors accept £600 million devolution deal

County councillors have voted to accept a county deal devolution agreement with the Government, to transfer significant funding and powers to Norfolk.

Government funding will start transferring to Norfolk next summer, if councillors vote in July 2024 to stage the first election for a leader in May 2025. The deal will mean that decisions can be taken in Norfolk, for Norfolk.

The full council agreed the following recommendations:

Council:

- Recognises the work carried out during 2023 to consult with the public, inform Members and prepare plans in relation to the 'in-principle' County Deal brought to Council in January this year
- Commends the work undertaken by the Leader and Officers to secure additional benefits for the Norfolk County Deal and resolves that the Deal should be accepted
- Agrees that the election for the Directly Elected Leader should be held alongside the county council elections in May 2025 to enable the widest possible engagement with the electorate
- Agrees that the resolution adopting the new governance arrangements should be brought to the Full Council meeting on 23 July 2024 to facilitate that election date

For further details go to **www.norfolk.gov.uk/norfolkcountydeal**.

Background – what would a county deal mean?

Norfolk faces a major opportunity to gain new powers and funding from the Government, through an agreement called the County Deal.

We could make more decisions in Norfolk, for Norfolk and secure investment of more than £600m over 30 years. If councillors agree the in-principle deal, it will enable us to invest in areas such as transport, skills and job opportunities, housing and regeneration, tailored to the needs of local people.

A County Deal would mean:

- Having a Council Leader who is directly elected by the public, enabling Norfolk's voice to be heard by the Government
- Targeting funding and resources to Norfolk's own priorities
- Unlocking housing and employment sites

- Investing in the skills we need and attracting and retaining key businesses
- Opening the door to more – further powers and funding in future

Householders to get free DIY waste for small projects

Norfolk residents will be able to dispose of small amounts of DIY waste at Norfolk's Recycling Centres free of charge from 31 December following changes made by Norfolk County Council.

The change applies to small-scale projects carried out by householders on their own home, allowing them to bring a maximum 100 litres (must fit into 2 x 50l bags) for free or one single item (maximum size of 200cm x 70cm x 75cm). Each household is allowed four free visits with DIY waste every four weeks. Anything beyond this will still be charged at normal rates.

The change in policy follows Government abolishing charges for the disposal of limited amounts and types of DIY waste at recycling centres across the UK.

Prior to 31 December, customers with DIY-type construction and demolition waste will continue to be directed to the 'Pay as you throw service' which is available at all centres.

Traders must continue to pay for DIY waste.

For more information visit **www.norfolk.gov.uk/DIYwaste**

Award-winning Adult Learning service rated 'Good' by Ofsted

Norfolk County Council's Adult Learning has been rated as 'Good' following their latest Ofsted inspection.

The inspection report praised the ambition of the service, which provides community-based and online learning for around 6,000 adults a year. The service achieved a 'Good' rating across all six areas that were inspected, alongside the overall 'Good' rating.

Inspectors commented that learners are 'highly motivated' and committed to their studies. They praised the number of people who have a 'clear plan' for their future careers and that they want to improve their economic prospects.

In particular, inspectors highlighted the work with residents of retirement homes who have increased their confidence, self-care and resilience after completing

courses in basic cookery. They commented how, following the course, learners felt less isolated and 'excited to prepare and eat their own meals'.

It was also recognised that the service has responded effectively to the growing demand for English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) courses.

There was praise for the work with Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service apprentices. The inspectors saw how the course helps them to work safely while learning about the importance of health and nutrition. The report concluded that the 'apprenticeship is well matched to the needs of the fire service.'

This inspection result comes on the back of Norfolk County Council Adult Learning being named 'Further or Higher Education Provider of the Year' at this year's Norfolk Education Awards. This followed national recognition in 2021 where the service was named adult and community learning provider of the year at the Tes Further Education Awards.

Norfolk County Council Adult Learning offers a wide range of courses for adults of all levels and interests. Whether you want to change your career, improve your skills, or pursue your passion.

Find out more about Adult Learning and browse the course catalogue at **www.norfolk.gov.uk/adultlearning**.

New year, New you. Norfolk gears up for a healthy 2024

More than half of Norfolk's residents are planning to make a New Year's resolution this year, with losing weight and healthier eating topping the list, according to a survey* carried out by Public Health at Norfolk County Council.

Fifty-eight per cent of respondents said they would make a resolution this year, with 34% saying that they would like to lose weight and 27% saying that want to eat healthier in January and onwards. Reducing stress (18%) and drinking less alcohol (11%) were also high on the priority list for 2024.

It should be a successful start to the county-wide health kick, as 42% residents claim that previous resolutions have been kept to for six months or more and just 7% slipping in the first week.

Fortunately, for anyone who's looking to make a change but struggles to stick to goals, Ready to Change is a great free online tool with lots of support. Those looking to reach a healthy weight, drink less or give up smoking can go online and there are quizzes to

help you understand what you might need to improve as well as loads of tips and information about free support in Norfolk.

Professor of health psychology Felix Naughton, a behaviour change expert from the University of East Anglia said: "Planning is key to successfully achieving your goal. Write down your goal, including how and when you will achieve it, get the support of friends and family, and think about anything that might get in the way and how you will get around it."

Visit **www.readytochange.co.uk** for help setting your goals and action plans to get you the success you deserve in 2024.

*Online survey of 153 Norfolk residents carried out from 11 – 18 December.

Multi-million pound investment proposed to modernise Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service buildings

A multi million pound proposal to modernise fire and rescue buildings across the county is set to be considered by Norfolk County Council's Cabinet.

The work is part of the council's ongoing infrastructure investment to improve the inclusivity of Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service (NFRS) buildings to ensure they are fit for the future as the service recruits more women and looks to improve and standardise the layouts of its buildings for the health, safety and wellbeing of staff.

NFRS has looked at the equity of facilities at its fire stations, as well as what more it can do to minimise contamination of potentially harmful substances and recommended a range of changes to station layouts and facilities. These aim to create more purpose-built facilities for women and improve zoning to minimise the risk of contaminant spread.

To date cabinet has approved a £1.2m investment in a new logistics hub in Wymondham and wide-ranging improvements at Sprowston and Thetford fire stations.

Cabinet has now been asked to approve a three-stage approach to prioritising the modernisation of stations which requires an allocation of £2m from existing capital for 2024-25; with a follow-on £2m bid expected for 2025-26.

More modern fire stations, such as Carrow in Norwich will require minimum interventions, with the majority of the improvements focused at on-call stations. If

agreed, the timetable will be realigned to other initiatives such as decarbonisation of the wider county council estate to ensure best value for money.

NFRS also asked for cabinet acknowledgement of an estimated further £4.5m requirement for work beyond 2026 for improvements to its remaining estate.

The bid fits with the council's Strategic Property Asset Management Framework 2021/22 to 2026/27 to provide the right property, fit for purpose, in the right place, to meet current service delivery needs and to plan for the future.

24/7 free travel to all disabled bus pass holders in Norfolk

From 1 February 2024 all Norfolk residents who hold a disabled concessionary travel pass will be eligible for free bus travel 24 hours a day, seven days a week when travelling within the county.

The decision, which was published today by Norfolk County Council, means that more than 14,500 people across the county who hold a concessionary bus pass due to disability, and their eligible companions, will now be able to travel on any bus at any time free of charge across Norfolk.

Previously concessionary pass holders with a disability were only able to travel for free on buses off-peak (all day on Saturdays and Sundays but only from 09:30 Monday to Friday) except for those registered blind or visually impaired.

Offering free travel at all times is over and above the minimum requirement set by government, and is something that a local authority can choose to do but doesn't have to do. The change was recommended following an updated equality impact assessment of the scheme which concluded that it is now unfair to offer a discretionary enhancement to just one group of disabled people (i.e. those who are blind or visually impaired).

The recommendation agreed by the individual cabinet member was to 'extend the concessionary travel discretion of free travel at all times to all eligible disabled passholders and eligible companions, from 1 February 2024.'

The cost of providing this enhancement is estimated at £50,000 which will be funded by the Council's ring-fenced public transport budget provided by the Department for Transport.

Norfolk County Council's emergency team has busiest Christmas on record

Social workers in Norfolk had a busier Christmas and New Year than ever, with more than 800 calls coming in over the festive period.

The council's Emergency Duty Team, which helps respond to out of hours social care emergencies, was available 24/7 over the holiday period, supporting some of the county's most vulnerable people.

Christmas day was the busiest on record with 71 calls. The previous record was 50 calls in 2021, due to the pressures of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Over the Christmas bank holiday weekend, the team dealt with 414 calls and the New Year bank holiday weekend saw the team deal with 377 calls.

Requests ranged from formal mental health assessments, safeguarding children referrals and community care calls, such as elderly residents needed an increase in care or night visits.