

Barry Stone – County Councillor for the Clavering Division

Parish Report – March 2026



Norfolk County Council delivers balanced and responsible budget for 2026–27

Norfolk County Council has approved a balanced £613.8m budget for 2026–27, demonstrating strong financial leadership and prudent management in what remains one of the toughest funding climates in decades.

Under Conservative leadership, the council has once again delivered stability and certainty for residents, setting a balanced financial position while identifying £42.3 million in savings and efficiencies and committing £76.3 million in targeted investment to protect vital services and strengthen Norfolk's economy.

Despite significant national financial pressures and ongoing constraints in central government funding, Norfolk's Conservative administration has ensured the county remains on a firm financial footing, without resorting to emergency measures. This stands in stark contrast to a growing number of upper-tier authorities across the country that have issued Section 114 notices or are facing effective bankruptcy.

The budget enables the council to continue:

- Protecting frontline services
- Investing heavily in adults and children's services
- Delivering new libraries and modern learning hubs in key towns
- Supporting for heritage, culture, and tourism
- Driving transformative reforms to improve efficiency and outcomes
- Backing economic growth and infrastructure
- Maintaining long-term financial sustainability

Councillors also agreed a 4.998% council tax increase, in line with national funding assumptions and the continued reliance on local taxation to safeguard core services. Norfolk Conservatives have been clear that this decision reflects the financial realities facing councils nationwide, while ensuring essential services remain protected for Norfolk residents.

This budget reinforces Norfolk Conservatives' commitment to careful stewardship of taxpayers' money, strong local services, and a resilient future for the county.

County council elections confirmed for 7th May

Elections for all 84 divisions of Norfolk County Council will now go ahead on 7th May, following a late reversal by the Labour Government to withdraw its previous decision to postpone the vote.

The original postponement had been announced to allow councils to focus on preparations for local government reorganisation and devolution. However, the sudden change of direction has created uncertainty for local authorities across the country.

Despite the shifting national position, Norfolk County Council had responsibly prepared for all eventualities. The authority had already made financial provision and operational plans to ensure elections could proceed smoothly if required.

Local Conservative leaders have welcomed the confirmation that residents will have their say as planned. The Norfolk Conservatives have reiterated their commitment to strong local leadership, sound financial management and standing up for Norfolk's interests, particularly at a time when national policy decisions have caused disruption and uncertainty for councils.

With elections now confirmed, attention turns to ensuring a clear choice for voters about the future direction of the county and continued stable leadership for Norfolk.

Further details of the Government's decision can be found in its published statement on the postponement of local elections in England in May 2026.

Norfolk County Council invests in community led highway improvements across the county

Norfolk County Council has reaffirmed its commitment to supporting local communities with the approval of 99 new highway improvement schemes for 2026-27, delivered in partnership with town and parish councils across Norfolk.

Papers published today ahead of next month's Cabinet meeting highlight how the Parish Partnership Programme, now entering its fifteenth year, gives local communities a voice in shaping the highways enhancements that matter most to them, whether that's improving pedestrian safety, slowing vehicle speeds, or making it easier to walk, cycle or access local services.

This year's programme represents a total investment of £769,034, made possible through the longstanding 50/50 funding model. Town and parish councils will collectively

contribute £384,517, matched by £384,517 from Norfolk County Council, enabling more than twice as many small-scale schemes to be delivered than could be funded by the council alone.

In total local councils submitted 99 bids for 2026/27 and all were approved as viable schemes after being carefully assessed against value for money, community outcomes, safety benefits and compliance.

The programme will deliver across the county from Ashill and Attleborough to Wymondham and Weybourne and include;

- **68 small highway improvements** - such as village gateways, new trods, signage, surfacing, benches, and access improvements
- **31 vehicle activated speed sign (VAS/SAM2) projects**, helping encourage safer speeds through villages and towns. The County Council has stepped in to fully support this part of the programme following the withdrawal of previous funding from the Safety Camera Partnership

The full report including a list of all 99 schemes can be found from page 788 in the [cabinet papers online](#).

Norfolk County Council back hospitality with £250,000 support programme

Norfolk County Council is delivering targeted support for the county's vital hospitality sector, launching a £250,000 package at the Norfolk Market Towns Conference as part of a wider £1m investment in high streets.

More than 120 retailers and organisations gathered at Thursford to shape the future of Norfolk's market towns, highlighting the council's proactive, partnership-led approach to supporting local businesses.

Building on the success of the council's High Streets Matter initiative, the new programme will offer bespoke training for pubs, restaurants, hotels and independent retailers. Businesses can access practical workshops, both in-person and online, covering marketing, bookings, menu development and staffing, alongside business improvement grants of up to £1,000.

A further High Growth Programme will support 24 ambitious businesses with specialist advice and grants of up to £2,500 to help grow the next retail and hospitality success stories.

Additional Love Your Market Town grants will help businesses boost civic pride, increase footfall and celebrate what makes their town unique, while Retail Excellence courses are also available for non-hospitality high street businesses.

This investment underlines Norfolk Conservatives' commitment to backing local enterprise, strengthening market towns and ensuring Norfolk's high streets remain vibrant, resilient and ready to thrive.

Norfolk County Council launches 2026 Rural Business Awards

Norfolk County Council is once again shining a spotlight on the county's outstanding rural enterprise as nominations open for the prestigious Norfolk Rural Business Awards 2026.

From pioneering food and drink producers to forward-thinking farming innovators and dedicated community champions, the awards celebrate the very best of rural Norfolk. Businesses, individuals and organisations are invited to apply across nine categories, with finalists honoured at a special ceremony during the Royal Norfolk Show in June.

Now firmly established as a highlight of Norfolk's business calendar, the 2026 awards were officially launched on 10th February at the Norfolk Farming Conference, underlining the council's ongoing commitment to supporting and championing the rural economy.

Delivered by Norfolk County Council in partnership with the Royal Norfolk Agricultural Association, the awards recognise excellence, innovation and resilience across the county's diverse rural sectors. The council continues to work closely with partners and sponsors to ensure rural businesses receive the recognition they deserve.

Each category will be judged by a specialist panel, who will review applications and follow up with shortlisted nominees before selecting the winners. The closing date for entries is Tuesday 21st April.

Winners will receive a trophy and certificate, as well as the opportunity to use Norfolk Rural Business Awards branding in their promotions, a mark of excellence backed by Norfolk County Council.

The categories are:

- Best Rural Community Initiative - sponsored by Pearn Wyatt Transport Ltd
- Best Rural Innovation in Practice - sponsored by Birketts
- Best Food and Drink Producer - sponsored by Fountain Fresh Imports
- Norfolk's 'Unsung Hero' - sponsored by Poultec
- Best Food and Farming Champion - sponsored by CLG Norfolk
- Best Emerging Talent - sponsored by PlantGrow
- Best Rural Tourism Attraction - sponsored by Thursford
- Best Woman in Agriculture - sponsored by Lovewell Blake

- Best Rural Business - sponsored by New Anglia Growth Hub

Find out how to apply by visiting www.norfolk.gov.uk/business/norfolk-rural-business-awards.

Norfolk strengthens support for fostering

Leaders at Norfolk County Council have reaffirmed their commitment to strengthening fostering services and supporting foster families across the county.

The council continues to focus on:

- Expanding fostering capacity
- Enhancing regional collaboration
- Innovating to improve outcomes for children
- Developing stronger support for foster families
- Simplifying processes and putting trusted relationships first

This builds on significant investment, agreed last month, which will see:

- A 15% uplift in fees for mainstream and kinship carers
- Additional uplifts for mainstream carers looking after children aged 10 and older
- Greater rewards for long service
- An expanded therapeutic support team
- Enhanced practical support for foster families

Norfolk County Council is taking action to address the ongoing shortage of foster carers. There are children currently living in residential care who could thrive in a fostering family. Evidence shows that living in a family environment is less traumatic and leads to better long-term outcomes for children in care. It also represents better value for the local authority, with a residential care placement in Norfolk costing nearly £300,000 per year compared with around £45,000 per year for a foster home.

The council continues to play a key role in regional collaboration through Foster East, a partnership between 11 local authorities across the eastern region.

On average, five children per week come into care in Norfolk. The council works with around 300 fostering households who look after children ranging in age from babies to young adults.

For further information visit www.norfolk.gov.uk/fostering

Boost for water safety as new rescue boats arrive

Norfolk Fire & Rescue Service has taken delivery of six new Zodiac Milpro ERB400 rescue boats to strengthen its response to water emergencies across the county.

The boats will support rescues on inland waterways and the Broads, as well as assist during major flooding incidents. They will replace ageing vessels at King's Lynn, Great Yarmouth, Dereham and Carrow fire stations, with an additional boat based at the Training and Development Centre in Bowthorpe to enhance in-house training.

Crews will complete familiarisation training before the new fleet becomes fully operational. The investment modernises equipment that was more than 18 years old, ensuring firefighters are equipped to respond quickly and safely.

Norfolk Fire & Rescue Service will continue working with partners through the county's Water Safety Forum to educate the public about staying safe around water. In any coastal emergency, residents should call 999 and ask for HM Coastguard.

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Kind regards

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