May 24 CLLR Report

Economy-boosting Local Enterprise Partnership to continue under County Councils

Business support and other economy-boosting services delivered by New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) are to continue following its integration into Norfolk and Suffolk County Councils.

Key functions and employees of the LEP transferred to the authorities on 1 April 2024 as part of the Government's devolution process. Its functions include business representation, strategic economic planning, and responsibility for the delivery of government programmes.

Business support will continue to be provided by New Anglia Growth Hub - which delivers the LEP's business growth programme, including the administration of grant schemes.

The Growth Hub has supported businesses and the region's economy, with the economic impact of its Business Growth Programme measured over a 10-year period at £1,032,797,741, creating new jobs and safeguarding existing employment.

Major construction and infrastructure projects across Norfolk have received significant funding thanks to the LEP's Growth Deal with Government, which secured £223.5m for the region to 2021. These include the recently opened Herring Bridge in Great Yarmouth, the Digi-Tech Factory at City College Norwich, and Productivity East, the centre for engineering, technology and management at the University of East Anglia.

Great Yarmouth's Operations & Maintenance Campus for the offshore industry, and the North Walsham Town Centre improvements were among the shovel-ready schemes for which the LEP secured £32.1m from the Government's Getting Building Fund.

The LEP's work can also be seen in the projects supported via its Growing Places Fund, such as Broadland Food Innovation Centre at the Food Enterprise Park at Honingham, and the power upgrade for businesses at Snetterton Park.

Both councils have worked closely in the run-up to the transition and are keen to build on the LEP's 13-year legacy.

Established by the government in 2011, New Anglia LEP has:

- Attracted around £350m in Government funding to Norfolk and Suffolk, attracting a further £1.3bn in public and private sector funds.
- Awarded over 1,800 grants totalling £51.4m to businesses and organisations in the region.
- Invested £4.172m in high growth businesses through its New Anglia Capital.
- Supported over 13,000 businesses and delivered nearly 74,000 hours of support via New Anglia Growth Hub.
- Added £1bn to the local economy over 10 years through its Business Growth Programme.
- Supported the delivery of 5,476 jobs and 222 businesses via its Enterprise Zones.

Inspectors say progress and improvements are evident at Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service

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

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

The report recognised the service's sound financial management, positive working culture, and the high priority it gives fire prevention.

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 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.

They noted a positive working culture with staff feeling empowered to challenge poor behaviours and the service acting to tackle bullying, harassment and discrimination, dealing effectively with disciplinaries, grievances and dismissals.

A good approach to equality, diversity, and inclusion and a good people strategy which aims to attract, retain and develop a diverse and talented workforce, create an inclusive culture, and better represent the community it serves were also noted in the report.

Staff wellbeing is a high priority with a significant range of support available for both physical and mental health and most staff reporting they understand and have confidence in the processes available, the report said.

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

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.

The HMICFRS team spent eight weeks in Norfolk in September and October 2023 in the third of its ongoing series of inspections of fire and rescue services across the country. These are an assessment of the services' effectiveness and efficiency and how well they look after their people. It last carried out a full inspection in Norfolk in October 2021.

Other key findings were:

- Prevention activity has been made a high priority, with staffing increased from three to 15 officers with specific staff dedicated to water safety, road safety, and reducing arson
- Engagement with the community has improved, including seldom-heard groups, with positive work noted with partners, other fire and rescue services, and Norfolk Resilience Forum
- Staff have a good understanding of how to identify vulnerability and safeguard vulnerable people and have almost doubled the number of home fire safety visits in the year to March 2022
- Norfolk's highest-risk premises have all been inspected to a high standard with a new business engagement officer in the Protection team employed to improve work with businesses

- The service shows sound financial management and is working well with Norfolk County Council to develop and support increased funding for its improvement plans across its fleet, estate, and for technology improvements

It was found that NFRS is adequate at: protecting the public through fire regulation; responding to fires and other emergencies; making the best use of its resources and within its workforce promoting its values and culture and ensuring fairness and diversity.

It requires improvement in preventing fires and other risks, getting the right people with the right skills, and managing performance and developing leaders.

Apprenticeships Norfolk hits £1m milestone in levy transfer scheme success

An apprentice butcher has told of how his life has been changed by an innovative levy transfer scheme in Norfolk - which has now achieved £1m of levy transfers.

Harvey Boyer was unemployed and struggling with his mental health until the Apprenticeships Norfolk scheme supported him to receive the training to work at Hethersett Butchers near Norwich.

Thanks to the initiative, 90 businesses in the county have started 180 apprenticeships, from Level 2 through to Level 7, using unspent funds that would otherwise been returned to HM Treasury.

Without levy transfers from organisations with strong ties to the county, including a new additional £100,000 commitment from Aviva, many smaller businesses would have been unable to create new apprenticeship opportunities.

The scheme has now hit the £1m milestone a year ahead of schedule. Harvey's apprenticeship, which began in August 2023, was made possible after Alan Boswell Group transferred its levy.

The apprenticeship levy is payable by organisations whose annual wage bill is more than £3m and equates to 0.5% of the bill. But if the business has undertaken all the apprenticeships that it has capacity to deliver, it can donate up to 25% of its annual apprenticeship levy to another organisation. Levy transfers are used for new apprentice starts, new recruits and existing employees.

Any businesses wanting to find out more about can **view details about the scheme on the Apprenticeships Norfolk website**. Businesses can enquire about receiving a levy transfer, or donating their unspent levy, by completing an expression of interest form or calling 0344 800 8024.

Next stage of Norfolk's ambitious climate plan revealed

Actions to support low carbon transport, climate adaptation, and decarbonisation of local business and industry was discussed by councillors at last months meeting of the Infrastructure and Development Select Committee.

The actions cover a range of initiatives, including:

- 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

In June 2023, Norfolk County Council launched its climate strategy setting out how the council will address its own carbon footprint and its role in supporting Norfolk's transition to become a greener and more resilient county. In October 2023 the first set of actions to achieve the aims of the strategy were agreed - and committee members will now be reviewing the third set of practical actions set to help make the low carbon vision a reality.

First Bus completes transformation of Roundtree Way 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 works to convert the depot began in July 2023 and have taken eight-months to complete. The total investment made in the infrastructure and buses was £37.2 million. This comprises £14.7 million of Zero Emission Bus Regional Areas (ZEBRA) Government funding, bid for and won with Norfolk County Council, and a capital investment of £22.5 million from First Bus.

The new electric vehicles produce zero tailpipe emissions. This makes them great news 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 introduction of the new bus fleet means that over half of the Norwich network operated by First Bus is now electric. That is over 60% of all bus journeys through Castle Meadow in the city centre.

To mark the completion of the project, a celebration was held at the depot on Wednesday 13th March. Guests included First Bus Managing Director, Janette Bell, East of England Managing Director Piers Marlow and Chief Sustainability Officer Isabel McAllister. They were joined by representatives from Norfolk County Council, including Chairman Cllr Barry Stone.

New highways contracts will focus on value, apprenticeships and carbon reductions

Norfolk County Council has kicked off discussions with potential bidders about its long-term highway maintenance contracts, focusing on value for money for Norfolk taxpayers, apprenticeships for local youngsters and reducing the carbon footprint from highway maintenance.

The council is consulting major contractors about potential twelve-year contracts for highway maintenance and associated professional services and for traffic signal maintenance.

The council says that, as now, it expects the contracts to be used mainly for highway maintenance and highway schemes, but it will have the option under the contracts to buy other civil engineering work such as recycling centre construction and flood defences.

The council plans to invite tenders later this year for the new contracts, which take effect from April 2026.

New national guidance set to improve the safety of people with care needs

New fire standard guidance launched this week thanks to innovative work by Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service is set to improve the safety of people living at home with care needs.

The new guidance for the technology enabled care sector (TEC) focuses on improving the standards of community alarm provision for people who rely on it to live safely and independently at home.

It aims to ensure not only that people have a community alarm linked to a smoke detector fitted in their homes to protect them against fire risk, but that crucially the alarm is also monitored by an alarm receiving centre whose staff are trained to deal with calls and work with fire and rescue service first responders correctly.

Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service's Prevention team has been at the forefront of a national special interest group which developed the new guidance.

ssistive technology is vital in helping the increasing number of people with care needs to live better lives at home. The new fire standard aims to establish a consistent, high-quality and standardised approach to community alarms to make sure those who rely on them can have confidence they will get the very best help in an emergency.

Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service's Prevention team, which is led by Group Manager Terry Pinto, has played a key role in leading this work with the TEC Services Association (TSA), which is the industry body for TEC and the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC). The county council's Assistive Technology team, which is part of Adult Social Care, have also been part of the work. The guidance was launched at the ITEC conference organised by the TSA in Birmingham.

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