

NCC Updates

County council elections to take place on 7 May

On 16 February, the Government announced that it was withdrawing its decision to postpone the county council elections - which means elections will now take place, as originally planned, for all 84 county council divisions in Norfolk.

The elections had originally been postponed to enable the council to focus on preparations for local government reorganisation and devolution.

The Government's decision is available [here](#).

Norfolk County Council budget approved

Following the full council meeting on 17 February, Norfolk County Council has approved its budget for 2026-27.

The budget delivers a balanced financial position, with £42.3 million in savings and efficiencies and £76.3 million of targeted investment to support essential services and strengthen Norfolk's economy.

Councillors also agreed a 4.998% increase in council tax, reflecting the Government's funding assumptions for the year and the continuing reliance on local taxation to maintain core services.

[You can watch the meeting and read the reports on the council's website.](#)

Norfolk Fire and Service

Norfolk Fire & Rescue Service (NFRS) handled almost 18,000 emergency calls last year, an increase of more than 1,600 calls on the previous 12 months and the highest number on record.

The service attended a record 10,024 incidents across Norfolk- dealing with everything from fires and water rescue to height/confined space rescue, animal rescue and public safety incidents such as dangers on the highway or with dangerous structures in towns and villages.

Prevention and engagement teams, and Norfolk crews, carried out more than 1,200 educational visits to help people better understand fire and rescue related risks, with the aim of reducing emergency incidents in the face of new and emerging risks such as lithium-ion battery fires.

More than 8,700 home fire safety visits were carried out, supporting vulnerable people to stay safe in their homes. During the visits, fire teams are able to fit smoke alarms and thanks to a partnership with Cadent can also fit carbon monoxide alarms.

More facts and figures are available in our news release [here](#).

Further details about services and advice from Norfolk Fire services is available on their webpages [here](#).

Highway improvements across Norfolk

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.

Reports for the Cabinet meeting on 2 March highlight how the Parish Partnership Programme gives local communities a voice in shaping the highways enhancements that matter most to them - such as 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.

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

Government decision relating to Westen link capital funding

The Government has approved the council's capitalisation direction for the Norwich Western Link. This allows previously received grant funding to be used to write off costs already incurred in developing the scheme prior to the insurmountable issues raised by Natural England, which ultimately prevented the project from proceeding in its original form.

The decision removes financial uncertainty and provides clarity on the project's legacy costs and expenditure write off. The council will now continue work on developing an alternative route to meet the scheme's objectives.

National Updates

Schools White Paper published

The Government's [Schools White Paper 'Every Child Achieving and Thriving'](#) has been published.

This sets out a 10-year reform programme for schools and SEND. It aims to raise standards, improve inclusion and halve the disadvantage attainment gap for disadvantaged and SEND children.

The proposals include an expectation that every school provides a broad, high-quality enrichment experience as part of a wider, ambitious curriculum. Reforms include new funding models, improved support and the expansion of family hubs, breakfast clubs and mental health support.

The paper positions schools as key partners within the wider system that includes local authorities, health services, social care, voluntary and community organisations.

Alongside the White Paper, the Government has also published a consultation on reforms to the SEND system, [SEND reform: putting children and young people first](#). This sets out a broader set of reforms, building upon proposals set out in chapter 3 of the White Paper.

SEND proposals include a significant shift towards earlier, mainstream support for children with SEND, including new Individual Support Plans (ISPs) for pupils who need additional help. Over time, it is expected that EHCPs will be focused on the most complex needs, supported by

increased specialist advice through the “Experts at Hand” programme. Special schools (such as the two new schools being built in Norfolk) will ensure there is the right support for those with the greatest needs.

Further details and information about the White paper and SEND proposals are available in the links below:

- The Government blog page for parents - [Schools white paper: What parents need to know about changes to the SEND system](#).
- The [Local Government Association briefing](#) on the Schools White Paper that sets out their response and the key proposals in the paper.

Government response to the Post Office Green Paper

The Government’s response to the Post Office Green Paper confirms the long-term protection and modernisation of the Post Office network, with a commitment to at least 11,500 branches and a new requirement for a minimum number of full-time, full-service branches.

This is welcome news for local communities, as Post Offices remain at the heart of many communities, offering trusted access to essential services and acting as important local hubs, especially in rural areas. They are also helpful to residents who are digitally excluded, and as community assets, supporting local high streets.

Environment Agency teams protecting waterways from pollution

The Environment Agency [recently announced](#) that in East Anglia, since 2024, an additional five water industry regulation teams have been put in place to hold Anglian Water to account. They say that they have increased their water enforcement workforce almost fivefold – from 41 roles in 2023 to 195 by March, with a further increase planned later in 2026. Water company environmental performance has continued to decline in recent years, driving the need for stronger, more visible enforcement action.

This approach builds on the government’s [recent launch of the Water White Paper](#), a plan to overhaul the water system, delivering tougher oversight and stronger accountability for water companies.

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