

## Progress report

### County Council budget

On 17<sup>th</sup> February, the Council met to vote on its budget for 2026-7. The final Local Government Finance Settlement was confirmed on 9 February, which included new investment in local services to over £5.6 billion over the next three years. It is the first multi-year settlement in a decade, so that is very welcome. Additionally, councils can have 90% of their historic deficits relating to SEND (Special educational needs and disability) up to 2025-26 written off. However, there's no funding for the other 10% and there are strings attached. It also provides no relief for the deficits that will accrue in 2026-7 and 2027-8. The debts are because Special Educational Needs provision was permanently underfunded during the decades of Conservative government which led to Councils with SEND responsibilities accruing massive debts that increased every year. Overall this is a more benign settlement than we ever got with the Conservative government. The administration has accordingly put in a Council tax increase in line with what the government was presupposing, since that is necessary to cover the basic services that the council must deliver. The administration presented a balanced budget by way of cuts and savings (42.3 million) and additional investment in services and the Norfolk economy (76.3 million).

In the debate, the Green Group challenged some of the Administration's priorities. Our proposed changes were voted down, but these are some of the things we thought would be beneficial:

- shifting some bus service funding towards a feasibility study to support the new Mayor, concerning the potential benefits of reduced fares or free bus travel (as in Scotland) to help young adults to access college and work.
- a trial scheme to address the school-run situation outside local schools (using camera enforcement for a "school streets" scheme, in which cars are excluded from the area at school run time).
- Diversion of the funding for extra weedkiller and extra verge cutting, to use it instead for replacing lost street trees in urban areas (where trees are being lost faster than they are replaced) and for regular funding for more nature-based schemes to protect wetlands and chalk streams that once flowed well and for flood protection in downpours.

You can watch the debate on the Council Youtube site.

### Reinstated elections

County Council elections are now on for May 7<sup>th</sup> this year, as they should always have been. This will be all-out elections for all County Council seats across Norfolk (including my own) and one third of the seats on Norwich City Council. The term of office to which the new councillors are elected is likely to be two years (if unitary councils are ready to take over by 2028). However, the timetable for local government reorganisation may shift again.

Could you benefit from a community energy scheme (and stop the industrialisation of our countryside)?

The government has announced new funding for community energy projects. Some of our parishes and district councils are working with Community Climate Action to devise a scheme to benefit local people and get clean cheap energy: <https://www.communityclimateaction.uk>.

If you haven't already, do join up to the *Norfolk Environmental Collaboration* (organised by the Norfolk Association of Local Councils). I attended their meeting on Friday 13<sup>th</sup> February.

### Better buses

I'm working on bus shelter improvements in Carleton Rode and Dickleburgh, and a better bus service for Burston and Shimpling and I'm in discussions about a bus service for villages such as Ashwellthorpe and Tacolneston, to go to Wymondham. The good news is that Norfolk County Council has received a multi-year settlement of money for public transport.

### Sewage and fly tipping

We seem to have a problem of commercial fly tipping in the countryside, and an almost permanent outflow of sewage near Dickleburgh Moor. These are keeping me busy trying to get something done about it. I believe Anglian Water has made promises to solve the latter.

## Updates from County Council and the Health Board

### Parish Partnership results out

99 schemes have won support for their proposals under the parish partnership scheme. From West Depwade I've been happy to support the following successful schemes in this round:

Traffic calming chicanes, £25,000 , Ashwellthorpe

Village Gateways: Aslacton £8421; Bressingham, £4548

SAM cameras/equipment: Great Moulton (£3928), Winfarthing (£4685).

### New Crisis and Resilience Fund

Norfolk County Council has announced a new Crisis and Resilience Fund to provide rapid support while building longer-term financial resilience for residents across the county. It replaces the national Household Support Fund. It includes crisis-help plus wraparound assistance (e.g. support with budgeting, digital access, debt, referrals to other services). Further details [here](#).

### Big Norfolk Holiday Fun – Easter holiday activities

Big Norfolk Holiday Fun, funded by the UK Government, provides free holiday activities and nutritious meals for eligible children and young people across Norfolk. The Easter programme runs from 30 March to 13 April 2026. It's open to children aged 4–16 who are eligible for benefits-related free school meals. There are also 'Awarded Places' for children identified as particularly vulnerable (referral by a professional).

Activities include sport, outdoor adventure, swimming, arts and crafts, and more. See [www.norfolk.gov.uk/bignorfolkholidayfun](http://www.norfolk.gov.uk/bignorfolkholidayfun)

## National Information

### Funding for public libraries in deprived areas for the National Year of Reading

The Government has [announced](#) up to £150,000 cash boost for public libraries to support the National Year of Reading.

The fund is expected to support projects across 72 library authority areas which are disadvantaged by high deprivation, weak social infrastructure and low library engagement. Unfortunately, since I believe in Norfolk we are all avid readers and users of our public libraries, I guess we shan't actually get any of this money!

### Contact me

[Catherine.rowett.cllr@norfolk.gov.uk](mailto:Catherine.rowett.cllr@norfolk.gov.uk). See also my Facebook page [here](#).

*Catherine Rowett*

9<sup>th</sup> March 2026