

## Devo and RPG

Councillors have backed a report which says replacing Norfolk's eight councils with one would save £36.2m per year and deliver the biggest benefits to residents.

Norfolk County Council's cabinet today selected a single unitary council as its preferred option, which will be developed into a detailed proposal and submitted to the Government in September.

County council leader, Councillor Kay Mason Billig, said the council had gathered and considered evidence and listened to the public's priorities - value for money, no fragmentation of services and keeping services as local as possible.

She said: "That all adds up to one Norfolk and one council."

Norfolk County Council has studied data and evidence on the pros and cons of one, two or three unitary councils and asked the public what mattered to them about local councils and services. It is proposing that its preferred option is one unitary council, covering the whole area.

Having one council would cut costs, join up services for residents and ensure strong financial foundations, according to the draft options appraisal report considered by the cabinet.

The county council's report says that the key benefits of one council for Norfolk are:

- A single council would mean consistent services, delivered across the whole of Norfolk, with equal levels of Council Tax, service quality and services available, wherever you live
- It would save £36.2m per year, by cutting duplication, reducing the number of chief officers and councillors and having economies of scale when purchasing services. Start-up costs would be repaid in a year
- It avoids the risks and costs of splitting up complex, county-wide services like adult social services, children's services and highways - which would incur extra costs of between £20.4m and £33.6m per year, if there were two or three unitary councils
- It recognises the role of greater Norwich as an economic centre of activity for the whole county and highlights the importance of not creating an artificial boundary around it, which would stifle growth

The report's conclusion says: "We have an opportunity to create a new council for Norfolk which can:

- Be a powerful advocate for Norfolk - speaking up and influencing as one voice for local communities, creating more impact, both with any Norfolk/Suffolk mayor and with the Government, businesses and investors
- Be accountable - our residents would know that one council was responsible for all of the services, removing confusion. There would be one set of locally elected councillors, with one set of elections
- Be efficient - removing duplication and bureaucracy and joining up services to deliver better value for money
- Enable devolution - through a single, clear and concise set of strategic priorities for Norfolk and simplifying decision-making
- Avoid the use of untested models for delivering critical services to children, families, older people and some of the most vulnerable of our residents"

Now that a preferred option has been selected, there will be further engagement. The preferred option will be developed into a detailed proposal, to be submitted to the Government by 26 September. Ministers will take the final decision on what council structure to adopt.

The draft interim submission report highlights a range of potential benefits from having a single unitary council system, including:

- ending confusion - people would know that one council would deliver all services in their area.
- delivering value for money - with fewer sets of senior officers, councillors and council headquarters, freeing up money to invest in services.
- joining up services, to make them more effective - such as bin collection and waste disposal and enabling housing and social care to work more closely together;
- ensuring strong local links, through close working with town and parish councils, or local boards.

#### Fires

With more people heading outdoors, Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service is asking the public to be vigilant and report fires quickly.

Nationally, there have been several large wildfires and the National Fire Chiefs Council say above average temperatures and below average rainfall has heightened the risk.

In March, Norfolk Fire & Rescue Service attended 17 fires in the open, which is higher than usual for this time of year. Many of them were deemed to have been deliberately ignited and involved grassed areas and woodland. The incidents were spread right across the county, including King's Lynn, Gorleston, Reepham and Norwich. Crews also attended 13 outdoor fires, involving grassland, in February.

Crews have also attended several accidental outdoor fires this April, including one involving discarded cigarettes and another with a barbecue that set fire to a house.

Chief Fire Officer Ceri Sumner said: "While the risk of wildfires is higher due to a lack of rainfall and higher temperatures, it is disappointing to see that so many of these incidents were deliberate. Fires are devastating for our habitats and pose great risk to the safety of our communities. Small fires can easily and quickly spread, posing risk to the county, its people and our firefighters.

"Warmer and drier conditions elevate the risk of fires spreading, so it is really important that if people see even just a small fire they call 999 quickly. Downloading the What Three Words app also helps us if it is a woodland or remote location, as the data callers provide allows us to pinpoint exactly where the incident is quickly."

As well as deliberately ignited fires, weather conditions increase the risk of accidental fires starting.

Simple steps residents can take to help reduce the risk of wildfire include:

Not using portable barbecues, which can accidentally set light to the ground and escalate quickly.

- Safely disposing of smoking materials such as cigarettes and matches, ensuring they are fully out.
- Disposing of rubbish in bins or taking it home. Glass bottles can pose a fire risk when discarded due to sunlight on the glass.

If you notice any suspicious behaviour or see someone intentionally starting a fire, contact the Police immediately or report the information anonymously to Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111. If you see a fire, call 999 immediately.

The brand-new Norwich Park & Ride service is set to launch this month with a number of key enhancements for residents and visitors to enjoy, along with free travel for everyone on the first day of operation.

Norfolk County Council selected two operators to run the services following the re-tendering process at the end of last year. The process was carried out with the objective of running the services from all five sites with no subsidy from the council.

From Sunday 30 March, First Bus will operate services from Airport, Thickthorn and Sprowston while Simonds will provide the service for Harford and Postwick.

The new service will offer:

- Earlier journeys in the morning
- Later journeys into the evening
- Increased frequency at most sites
- Sunday services at all sites
- Airport, Thickthorn and Sprowston services will have zero emission buses
- Continued low fares thanks to BSIP funding

The Norwich Park & Ride service is an important part of our transport plan for Norfolk and it gives people a great value and greener option for getting into Norwich. During these difficult financial times we made it our ambition to find a solution so that this service could be run without any subsidy, and we've not only achieved that, but we're also giving people what they asked for from the service which is earlier and later buses and Sunday services."

And then on the first day of service - Sunday 30 March - residents will be able to enjoy free travel from all sites, excluding Costessey as this is not a new service.

Norfolk County Council's annual spring and summer road surface dressing programme is due to start next Monday 7 April and will see Norfolk's roads get a new seal to help prevent potholes forming and extending the life of roads with a new skid-resistant surface to reduce the risk of accidents. The work will continue through until September, to take advantage of the warmer weather.

This year 320 miles of Norfolk roads will be dressed, up from 280 miles last year thanks to extra funding received from the Department for Transport for highways maintenance this year.

The programme will target high tourism areas and main roads first, so they are complete before the start of the busy summer season. The total programme will cost around £12 million and is a proven pro-active approach to highways maintenance.

Last year, Norfolk was the top performing county council in the country when it came to road repairs. According to Department of Transport statistics, Norfolk County Council fixed 92pc of repairs reported during 2023/24, and in the same year Norfolk County Council achieved first place overall in the National Highways and Transportation customer satisfaction survey.

**Surface dressing uses a waterproofing seal which consists of a thin layer of bitumen and stone chippings which is laid onto the road. This helps prevent water penetration and reduces the number of potholes forming when it freezes.**

People living along the routes which are due to be treated will receive notification a day or two before the crews arrive. They will be asked not to park on the road on the day of the surface dressing work, or on the following day when surplus chippings will be swept up. People are urged to drive slowly and considerately across the new surface until it is bedded in, and Highway Teams return to sweep up the loose chippings.

This is because the passage of vehicles over the new surface plays an important part in helping the new surface to settle in.

A 20mph speed restriction is imposed during work and on freshly laid surface dressing for safety reasons.

#### Roadworks - fines for non-compliant roadworks in Norfolk

Norfolk County Council has issued fines totalling £685,000 in a year for non-compliant roadworks as part of its ongoing efforts to reduce the impact of roadworks upon Norfolk's communities.

The Council's role is to coordinate and manage street works across the county. In 2024/25, they issued over 44,000 street and roadwork permits, with 75% of these relating to works by utility companies and developers. Of these, 7,000 were emergency works, which often cause the most disruption. The Council rejected 5,400 permit proposals that were unacceptable. However, their powers remain limited under national legislation, so 79 utility companies have a legal right to carry out works on public highways - and in emergency situations, can begin this work before notifying the Council.

The Council does have the power to issue Fixed Penalty Fines (FPNs) to utility companies for breaches such as working without a permit or failing to comply with permit conditions.

In 2024/25, Norfolk County Council issued 2,809 Fixed Penalty Notices (FPNs) for breaches such as working without a permit or failing to meet permit conditions—raising nearly £340,000 in fines. A further £345,000 was recovered from 306 cases where works overran, causing 1,317 days of disruption across Norfolk's roads.

In addition, the Council successfully prosecuted two utility companies, resulting in court-imposed fines of nearly £100,000, with full costs awarded to the Council.

#### Trading Standards

Successes including tackling tobacco and alcohol sales to children and removing dangerous electrical items from sale have been highlighted in a report detailing the work done by Norfolk's Trading Standards team to keep consumers safe across the county over the last year.

"Whether it's getting counterfeit vapes removed from sale, tackling unsafe electricals which can increase fire risk or ensuring pubs are serving full measures, the work of our Trading Standards officers over the last year has made a real difference to public safety both in Norfolk and beyond," said Norfolk's Chief Fire Officer Ceri Sumner, whose fire service remit includes Trading Standards.

Over the last year, Norfolk County Council's Trading Standards team has:

- Led a project across Eastern England to examine the safety of lithium-ion batteries and chargers sold online, resulting in the removal of 1,813 unsafe items from an online marketplace. More than half of the items test-purchased were found to be unsafe, risking electric shock, fire or explosion
- Concluded eight formal investigations relating to shops selling vapes to minors, illegal tobacco and vapes and rogue tradespeople. This work resulted in five prosecutions
- Worked with partners including police and local councils to address the problem of illegal vapes, obtaining closure orders from the courts where traders persist in selling illegal vapes or selling to minors
- Calibrated more than 25,000 pieces of equipment and verified weighing and measuring instruments for local, national and international businesses- generating income which has been invested back into the vital consumer safety work of Trading Standards
- Sought to protect people from fraud, scams and rogue traders by raising awareness, working with vulnerable people and introducing more No Cold Calling Zones

- Maintained the Trusted Trader Scheme so that Norfolk's residents can find reliable and trustworthy tradespeople, supporting the local economy to add revenue of £555k between April and December 2024
- Undertaken a sampling project to check that restaurants are correctly following allergen procedures, so that consumers are not put at risk of undeclared allergens, such as peanuts, in their meals
- Removed from sale unroadworthy cars and children's toys which failed consumer safety checks, including flammability tests

As well as the above they have also dealt with animal disease outbreaks in recent month, including the blue tongue virus and avian flu outbreaks.

Norfolk County Council's Trading Standards team works very closely with a range of partners, including colleagues in Norfolk Fire & Rescue Service. Increased collaboration over the last two years has seen fire investigators and TS officers work together to identify products which have caused house fires and drive forward work to get them removed from sale. They have also partnered on battery safety and electric blanket safety sessions for the public and the joint work was highlighted as a shining example of safety collaboration by The Office of Product Safety and Standards.

Due to a national shortage of qualified Trading Standards officers, apprentices have been recruited in two cohorts over recent years, in 2022 and 2024, ensuring that Norfolk will continue to have experts not just now and into the future to fulfil the council's statutory duties.

Building on this work, Trading Standards bosses submitted their service plan for 2025-2026 for approval by Norfolk County Council's Cabinet on 7 April.

It's highlighting the key areas for the year ahead, focusing on:

- Responding to business and consumer vulnerabilities
- Environmental protection, ensuring: businesses are supported to comply with new green legislative requirements, and the service operates in a manner to support the council's net-zero ambitions
- Investment in our workforce to develop a resilient service able to respond to a continually developing legal landscape
- Development of our service in response to the Food Standards Agency's new Food Standards Delivery Model
- Continued integration with Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service to realise improved services for businesses and communities and inhouse efficiencies
- Development of our commercial services and chargeable activities: increasing our income, primarily through our calibration and chargeable business advice functions to reduce our reliance on grant funding. This will include relocation of our Calibration Centre and the implementation of a webshop to increase calibration business and efficiency

#### Weed Treatments

- This year we received additional funding to undertake an additional weed treatment. So, this year we will be undertaking 2 weed spraying treatments
- The first is programmed to start on 19<sup>th</sup> May.
- I would anticipate the 2<sup>nd</sup> weed spray to be August / September but will depend on weed growth observed

### **Urban Grass Cutting**

- We undertake 4 urban cuts.
- The first urban cut started on 7 April and will broadly be completed now.
- The 2<sup>nd</sup> cut is programmed to commence on 19 May.
- The remaining 2 cuts will be scheduled based on levels of growth experienced in the summer period, although this likely to be July and September respectively.

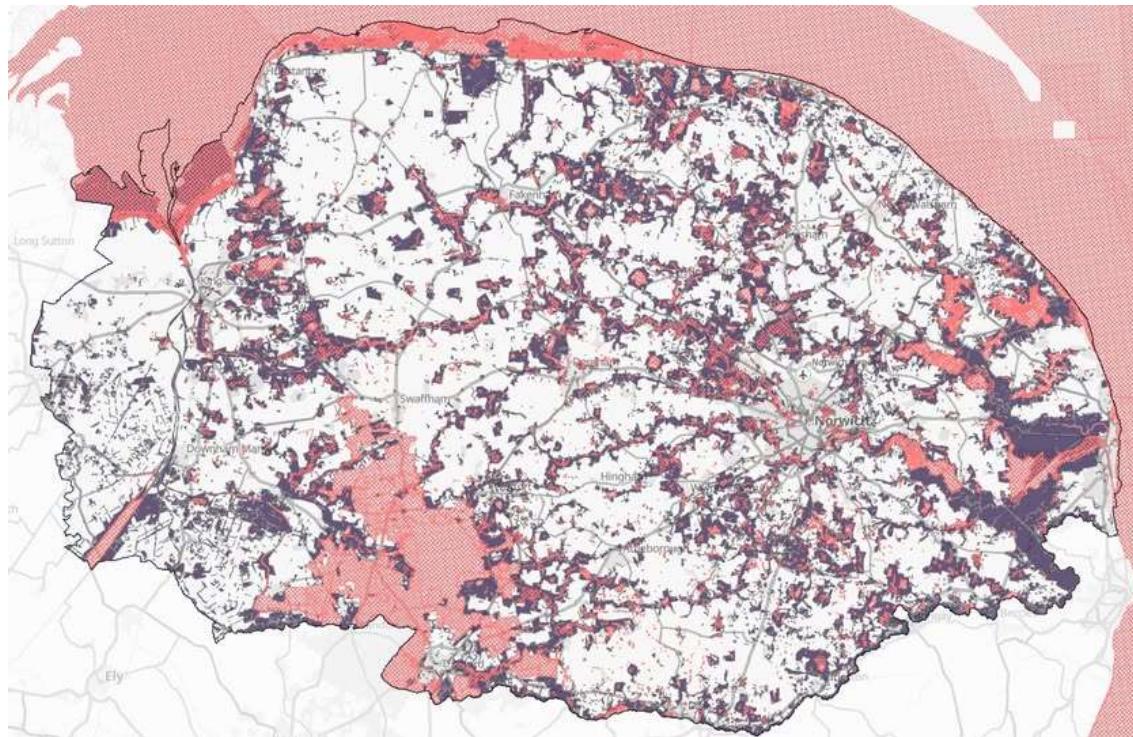
### **Rural Grass cutting**

- This year we have received additional funding in order to undertake an additional cut.
- So, this year we will be undertaking 3 rural cuts on A&B class roads, 2 rural cuts C&U class roads + a visibility cut.
- The first rural cut on all roads started on 7 April and will broadly be completed now.
- The remaining 2 cuts will be scheduled based on growth experienced in the summer period.
- Since April last year, we've been collaborating with mobile analysts Streetwave by using devices in some waste collection vehicles to survey the quality of mobile network coverage from the four main UK providers: EE, O2, Three and Vodafone.

### **Bus checking**

An alternative to our local bus app

### **[Bustimes.org](http://Bustimes.org)**



🔍 Have you seen our Local Habitat Map?

We want to know what we what you think it should contain!

Our consultation that is currently running seeks public input on Norfolk's Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS). 

The strategy aims to:

-  restore and enhance nature.
-  map areas of potential importance for nature and the actions that could achieve this.
-  reflect the needs and views of local communities, stakeholders, and experts.

To take part and find out more visit [https://orlo.uk/LocalNatureRecoveryStrategy\\_Znu00](https://orlo.uk/LocalNatureRecoveryStrategy_Znu00)

#### FTTP

The new utility. It has been an up and down ride getting rural fibre networks! At least 4 firms around my division.

We are now facing the roll out, causing a lot of TROs.

Hopefully by end of Spring to Early Summer the roll to residents will begin.

These themes will continue into the new year

#### Mobile signals

- Since April last year, we've been collaborating with mobile analysts Streetwave by using devices in some waste collection vehicles to survey the quality of mobile network coverage from the four main UK providers: EE, O2, Three and Vodafone.
- This has given us some excellent data, helping to build a good picture of coverage right across the county, but we can make this even more accurate by hearing about your experience with mobile coverage in Norfolk.
- So next time you're at home and get frustrated that your local chippy can't hear your takeaway order, or your phone cuts out on what should have been a nice conversation with a friend, take some time to complete our anonymous [mobile experience form](#).
- You can read more about the project and visit our mobile coverage checker to see which operator offers the best service in your area by [clicking here for the project's webpage](#).

- Scams
- Cold Calling Alert - Telephone cold calls regarding 'loft insulation'
- Cold Calling Alert - Doorstep Cold Callers offering roof cleaning
- Cold Calling Alert - Further reports of doorstep Cold Callers offering to purchase gold
- Scam Alert - Emails claiming 'your iCloud storage is full'
- News Alert - Protect your online accounts
- Information Alert - Be aware of misleading adverts for eVisa
- Scam Alert - Be aware for fake QR codes
- Scam Alert - Online surveys to receive high value items
- Rogue Trader Alert - Doorstep cold callers offering to clean driveways
- Scam Alert - Telephone cold calls claiming to be from 'the council disrepair team'
- Cold Calling Alert - Telephone cold calls asking about Life Insurance
- Scam Alert - Telephone cold calls claiming to be 'bank security department'
- Rogue Trader Alert - Doorstep cold callers offering to lay gravel
- Cold Calling Alert - Doorstep cold callers offering roofing work
- Avian Influenza confirmed, and controls put in place at a premises near Wymondham, Norfolk

- Rogue Trader Alert - Doorstep cold callers offering house and garden maintenance
- Cold Calling Alert - Doorstep cold callers offering exterior cleaning
- Scam Alert - Criminals targeting grieving families with online scams
- Information Alert - Emails claiming 'your pet's microchip registration has expired'
- News Alert - FSA Food Alert for Action: Jolly Rancher products by The Hershey Company
- Scam Alert - Emails claiming to be from 'M&S'
- Scam Alert - Text messages claiming to be from DWP
- Scam Alert - 'Council tax payment that appears outstanding' emails
- Rogue Trader Alert - Doorstep Cold Callers offering tree and garden work
- Scam Alert - Fake Parking Charge Notice text messages
- Rogue Trader Alert - Doorstep Cold Caller offering mattresses
- Cold Calling Alert - Cold calls regarding spray foam insulation removal
- Scam Alert - Investment Scams
- Cold Calling Alert - Doorstep Cold Callers offering exterior cleaning