



Latest update on events from your County Councillor Tom FitzPatrick

Fakenham Town Council

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Norfolk County Council updates

#NorfolkWinter is here – winter gritting

Norfolk's gritting fleet have been out for their first gritting runs of the season this week. The team will continue to review the latest information and forecasts throughout the winter and deploy the fleet when needed.

For the first time ever, all 58 of Norfolk's gritters will be fitted with brand new, state of the art auto-salting technology. Aided by satellite navigation, it will allow teams to salt the road with limited manual intervention, making the operation more accurate, saving time and reducing waste.

Norfolk Winter Information

As temperatures drop and icy conditions become more common, Norfolk County Council's annual travel information and safety campaign #NorfolkWinter launches on social media with information and advice to keep people moving around safely this winter however they choose to travel

- Updates will be posted to the county council's social media channels to let people know when gritting will be taking place. As well as tips and advice for travelling safely through the winter. Look for [the #NorfolkWinter](#) hashtag on Facebook, Nextdoor and X.

People can check which roads are on the council's gritting routes for this season on the map at www.norfolk.gov.uk/gritting. On the same map people can find the locations of around 2000 grit bins in the county that are filled by the County Council and which people can use on public pavements, cycle paths and roads to help everyone get around safely.

- Further information and support to help people keep healthy, happy and safe this winter is available on the county council's webpages.

Norfolk Libraries – words of welcome poetry project

Norfolk Library and Information Service has teamed up with Creative Arts East on a multi-lingual Words of Welcome Poetry Exchange, launched this month in all 47 libraries across the county. The project aims to celebrate Norfolk's cultural diversity and showcase it as a place of welcome, by inviting library visitors to read specially commissioned poems on the themes of welcome and sanctuary and respond with their own 'words of welcome'.

The National Centre for Writing have selected and commissioned acclaimed poets George Szirtes and Marjorie Lotfi to write two original poems. These have been translated into Arabic, Lithuanian, Polish, Portuguese and Ukrainian - some of the most widely-spoken languages in Norfolk. Beautifully designed postcards with these poems and their translations can be found in each of Norfolk's 47 libraries, for visitors to read and take home.

Library visitors are invited to respond to these poems on blank postcards with their own words of welcome and post them in the collection boxes provided.

Further information with a link to the poems and full project details is available on the NCC website.

Norfolk's ambulance and fire services shortlisted for an award

A collaboration between Norfolk's ambulance and fire services, designed to provide faster medical assistance, is in the running for the Collaboration of the Year at the Excellence in Fire & Emergency Awards.

Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service (NFRS) has seven fire stations across the county that respond to medical emergencies. Firefighters, trained by the ambulance service, can be sent to life-threatening medical emergencies in their communities. The co-responding fire stations are in Sheringham, Cromer, North Walsham, Dereham, Hunstanton, Heacham and Sandringham. Two more stations are currently being trained before going live as co-response stations.

The winner will be announced on 6 December. Further details available online.

National updates

Local Government re-organisation

The Minister for Housing & Local Government Baroness Sharon Taylor has revealed the government's "tiered approach" to reorganisation where regions can "progress as quickly as they are able and willing" [at the Local Government Chronicle Summit last week.](#)

The Minister stated that "If you are in a particular area, it's important to assess what makes sense for that region. For example, if you're moving towards a unitary authority, it's essential to have that conversation with the relevant minister. Alternatively, if you're ready and have the resources to transition directly to a combined authority, that route should also be available."

Further details are expected to be provided in the [English Devolution White paper that is due to be published before Christmas.](#)

Funding for local bus services

The Government has announced the detail of £712m being made available to local authorities for bus service improvements across the nation, with a separate £243m going towards bus operators.

The bus service improvement plan (BSIP) funding was first announced in the Autumn Budget. The Government has said the funding will help to keep fares down, protect local routes and deliver more reliable services.

- Norfolk will receive £15 million as our share of the funding.

Reforms to Children's Social Care.

The Government has [set out major reforms to the children's social care support system](#), with the intent of breaking the cycle of late intervention and helping keep families together wherever possible.

The reforms include a range of new measures which will be set out in Parliament in due course. These include putting a limit on the profit that providers can make on children's homes, requiring providers that provide homes for large numbers of children to share their finances with Government and giving Ofsted new powers to issue civil fines to providers, with the aim of more rapidly deterring unscrupulous behaviour.

The reforms come as total local government spending on looked after children has ballooned from £3.1 billion in 2009/10 to £7 billion in 2022/23, with social workers all too often burdened by heavy caseloads, struggling to deliver the help that children and families need before problems escalate.

Further plans for funding for children's social care, including investment in preventative services, are set to be laid out in the upcoming Local Government Finance Settlement.

Public Accounts Committee concern over SEND deficits

MPs in the [Public Accounts Committee](#) have said that one of their top concerns for public finances are around the deficits accrued in Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) budgets held by local authorities.

Their recent evidence session on support for children and young people with SEN focused on the National Audit Office (NAO) report which found that since 2019, there have been no consistent improvements in outcomes for children and young people with SEN despite significant increases (58%) in spending.

House of Commons debate – Flood preparedness Norfolk

On 20 November, there was a debate at Westminster Hall about flood preparedness in Norfolk. Westminster Hall debates give Members an opportunity to raise local or national issues and receive a response from a government minister. This debate was secured by Steff Aquarone, MP for North Norfolk and attended by MP's from across the parties in Norfolk, in addition to MPs from other counties.

The debate included the challenges Norfolk faces, the impacts of flooding, the need for greater investment in flood prevention and the need for better join up and action across departments and agencies. *[The Norfolk Strategic Flood Alliance was mentioned as a good practice example.](#)*

In her response, Emma Hardy, parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) mentioned some upcoming initiatives. She said that the Environment Agency is working to develop a natural flood management benefits tool that aims to provide a nationally consistent way of assessing both flood risk and the wider benefits of Natural flood management projects, and that fairly soon Defra will launch something called NaFRA2, which is basically maps for the whole of England that look at the flood risk for all different types of flooding. The latter, for the first time, will include surface water flooding—previously, it has just been river and tidal. It will also look at future flood risk—so not only the risk of flooding right now, but how the flood risk will change according to climate change.

The full transcript of the flood preparedness debate is available at Hansard online [here](#).

Policing reforms

In her first major [speech at the annual conference](#) hosted by the National Police Chiefs' Council and Association of Police and Crime Commissioners, the Home

Secretary set out her plans to deliver major policing reforms and provide extra funding.

The reforms are intended to restore public confidence in policing. The key areas for reform are neighbourhood policing, police performance, structures and capabilities and crime prevention. Reforms will include:

- Community patrols with a neighbourhood policing guarantee and an enhanced role for Police and Crime Commissioners to prevent crime.
- Ensuring that policing has the national capabilities it needs to fight fast-changing, complex crimes which cut across police force boundaries.
- A new Police Performance Unit to track data across all police forces - on issues like knife crime and violence against women and girls.
- A new Police Performance Framework to be drawn up between policing and the Home Office to make sure standards are upheld across the country.
- A new National Centre of Policing
- More than half a billion pounds of additional central government funding for policing next year to support the government's safer streets mission to tackle neighbourhood crime and antisocial behaviour, including an increase in the core grant for police forces, and extra resources for neighbourhood policing, counter-terrorism and the National Crime Agency.

A full breakdown of the additional funding will be published as part of the police settlement in December.

The full details of the reforms are expected to be published in a new white paper on policing in spring, followed by legislation in due course.

Tom FitzPatrick

County Councillor for Fakenham Division

Vice Chairman of Norfolk County Council

(Dunton, Fakenham, Helhoughton, Hempton with Pudding Norton and Testerton, Raynham & Tattersett)