

## £59m integrated budget to deliver improved services

**An innovative move by Social Services and the NHS to create a unified budget of nearly £59 million to fund learning difficulties services in Norfolk, is set to benefit thousands of clients, their families and carers in the years ahead.**

Using the flexibilities of the 1999 Health Act, the two budgets merged last month to provide a simpler and less bureaucratic system of care for the public which will see decision-making speeded up for those who need care.

Norfolk County Council now hosts a pooled budget for adult learning difficulty services on behalf of Norfolk Social Services, Norfolk Health Authority and West Norfolk Primary Care Trust.

Norfolk Health Authority will contribute £24.3m, West Norfolk Primary Care Trust £2.6m and Norfolk Social Services £32m. The Joint Director of Learning Disabilities Amanda Reynolds has become the pooled fund manager.

The integrated approach will mean that expenditure will be based on the needs of the users, and not on the level of contribution from each partner.

Dan Pritchard

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### *Freedom of Information Act*

## Greater public rights of access

New legislation requires the County Council and schools to produce a 'publication scheme' that will extend the rights of the public to access a broad range of information from January 2005. The Council must comply by next February and schools by February 2004.

Individuals already have access rights under the Data Protection Act 1998, but this latest requirement will include significant amounts of additional material – eg minutes of regular meetings, reports, programmes of work and terms of reference.

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## Spotlight on

# The Norfolk Children's Fund

Following our Spotlight article on Sure Start, we asked Nicky Dawson to write about one of its sister projects, the Norfolk Children's Fund, which she manages.

The Children's Fund is a new government initiative with two main criteria: To maximise life chances for 5 - 13 year old children at risk of social exclusion, and for statutory, voluntary and community sectors to work together in partnership to achieve this.

The Government set up the Children and Young People's Unit (CYPU) to lead on children's policy, and this unit initiated and controls the Children's Fund. They have a central team based in London, and a number of regional managers. 'Our' regional manager is based at the GO East (Government Office for the East of England) headquarters in Cambridge.

Baseline data about children in Norfolk at risk of social exclusion, and child poverty indices, were used to create a strategic plan. Final approval for funding was granted by the CYPU last October. We are getting £6.3 million over the three years to March 2004 and have just entered year two. The County Council is the accountable body and the lead agency.

Norfolk was one of the first 40 areas chosen to receive funding and is the only first wave partnership in the East of England. By next April all areas in England will be funded.

Initially interested parties came together to form a partnership. Service proposals were developed around the themes of family support, schools focussed projects, and rural isolation and hard-to-reach groups.

Trailblazer projects approved for year one included:

- A school transition project based in Diss helping children from small village primary schools successfully adjust to high school;
- Counselling and advice to meet the needs of young people in North Norfolk as they perceive them;
- Activity schemes in Norwich to raise children's self esteem.



*Children at work....*

Twenty new projects for year two await funding approval, covering such areas as disability, behaviour disorders, young carers, sexual health, children experiencing domestic violence, and peer group health education through drama.

Roughly £2 million of our year two budget is committed, with around half a million left for developing proposals to fill service gaps. Of our total budget, 88% is spent on service provision, the remainder going on central management costs.

The Norfolk Children's Fund partnership is managed as five local groups: North, South, East, West, and Central (Norwich), with the amount of funding each group receives depending on its need as defined by its baseline data. An Interim Partnership Board makes final decisions about which services to fund. The Fund is not a bidding agency.

# New school for Rackheath - a dream comes true

## **“I have a dream” - a famous phrase spoken by a famous person....**

It was 40 years ago that the inhabitants of Rackheath, a small village about six miles north of Norwich, also had a dream - a new primary school for the village.

The existing school comprises a 1902 school house, three mobiles, a condemned hall and outside toilets, with only a hard standing playground and no playing field.



**The old school....**

It is situated at the edge of the village, a few yards from a main road serving the local industrial estate, with a waste disposal/skip operation close by.

At one stage the number of pupils at the school dropped to 59, but with 250 houses built in the village in recent years, 93 children currently attend, and 114 are expected this September.

The need for a replacement school for the village has long been recognised by the County Council but it was only about 18 months ago that it was able to secure funds and move the project to the top of its capital projects list.

So, where are we now? The construction of the new school is about to start, with opening scheduled for next Easter. There will be space for 150 children, with five classrooms, a hall, staff room, and a playing field. The school will be in the centre of the village on land donated by a property consortium.

School governors and staff have been closely involved in the design process.

How much will it cost? £1.3m, financed, like other capital projects, by loan.

Will such a large investment make an educational difference? YES!

**The new school will bring environmental improvements, new equipment, technology, books and all those other components which contribute to children receiving the best possible education.**

Although Rackheath as a school is already doing well, the new facilities will make a big difference, ensuring that standards continue to rise.



**The site of the new school, where building work is about to begin.....**

So, for everyone in Rackheath – pupils, parents, staff, governors - a dream is coming true. A new school at last, built in the 21<sup>st</sup> century with all modern facilities, giving our children the best possible chance and providing an asset for the whole community.

Tony Howard  
Chair of Governors

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# BIG ROADS – BIG BUDGETS

**If you've found yourself driving on a stretch of new road recently, it's probably because Planning and Transportation have been spending a transport funding windfall!**

Central government announced back in late 2000 that councils would receive more cash for their Local Transport Plans. In Norfolk this meant a settlement of some £30m for 2001/02, which was two and a half times more than the previous year.

The DTLR defines a 'major' transport scheme as one worth over £5 million. The Government funds these in full - 50% by grant and 50% by credit approvals (permission to borrow).

Smaller schemes come out of our general transport allocation and a capital works programme is agreed annually by the County Council.

**Two direct results of the increase in spending are the recently-opened Broome-Ellingham by-pass on the A143, which cost £7.1m, and the Corpusty Link Road on the B1149, which cost some £1.8m.**

Both of these roads are now bringing considerable relief to rural communities, whose lives had been blighted by busy roads which were full of heavy goods traffic.

Like all major capital projects, initial cost forecasts by P&T's engineering designers are refined as the project progresses. One factor which can



**The opening of a new road is a big event—this is Council Chairman Dr Jim Norris planting a tree at Corpusty.**

significantly affect a road scheme is contractor prices and these are rising in the construction industry due to the amount of work available and some skill shortages.

There are also the usual problems you can encounter on any construction project – even putting down a drive outside your house! Unexpected ground conditions, changes in the job specification and bad weather can all have an impact, making a sensible contingency provision essential.

It can be up to ten years before the accounts can finally be closed on a major road scheme – for example while land payments are settled.

Alison Smith

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If you would like this newsletter in large print, audio, braille, alternative format or in a different language, please contact Doris Piper on 01603 223488 or on minicom 223833.



## ***Vital technical expertise***

Finance staff help members, departments and partners of the County Council to improve performance by providing strategic financial advice and financial services.

To do this well staff need to understand thoroughly the aspirations of all concerned so that they can provide both opportunities and solutions that might not otherwise be available.

They also need to be technically expert, and to ensure that overall financial strategy, policy and standards are up to date and reflect best practice.

To make sure that this happens the Finance Board (an officer group made up of representatives of all spending departments) has set up a technical sub group. This comprises departmental finance officers, who will discuss technical and professional issues and propose changes, submitting these to the Finance Board.

At the group's recent first meeting, brainstorming brought up a number of issues for consideration, including:

- ◆ Reviewing Financial Regulations
- ◆ Reviewing the accounting approach for support service allocations
- ◆ Documenting and reviewing existing accounting practices for the implementation of the new Financial Information Management System.

The next step is for Finance Board to agree this work plan.

The work of the group will be crucial in implementing the action plan which will take forward the development of accounting and budgeting following the recent best value review.

John Neilson

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## **Beating those viruses!**

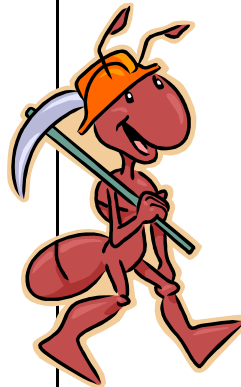
Did you know that the Capita Service Desk receives between three and four calls a day about viruses on PCs? This equates to 900 potential virus infections each year!

All County Council PCs should have anti-virus software installed. You should not attempt to remove this software from your machine under any circumstances.

*More than  
50,000  
viruses....*

This software also checks emails sent to NCC employees, blocking an average of seven viruses a day - or 1,750 potential virus infections each year!

In 1990, there were less than 100 viruses. Today it is estimated that there may be more than 50,000.



Because of the growth in the number of new viruses, anti-virus software must be regularly updated. This is done automatically on the majority of NCC PCs, but is not possible for dial-in users. The Capita Service Desk therefore regularly sends instructions to dial in users on how to update their software.

If you receive emails from the Capita Service Desk asking you to download the latest anti-virus software, please follow the instructions provided or your machine will not be protected against the latest viruses.

For more information, please contact the Capita Service Desk on 01603 495800.



## What does it mean??

### Closing the Accounts

This term is used to indicate that “a defined period of time” is coming to an end and the accounts for that period need to be closed.

The County Council defines the period of time as 12 months from 1 April to 31 March, also known as the financial year. When the accounts are closed, those involved must ensure that the accounts give a true and fair view of the activities undertaken during the defined period of time - ie that all income and expenditure for those activities is contained in the accounts.

To ensure that the accounts are accurate and complete, a number of final accounting entries are made during the final accounting period of the financial year, which is known as Period 13. This begins the first week of April and continues until the end of May, after which no further transactions are processed for the old accounting year. Closing accounting entries include:

- Setting up creditor and debtor provision
- Setting up amounts due from central Government grants
- Transfers to the County Council's balance sheet, eg contributions received before expenditure is incurred
- Contributions to funds, eg repairs and renewal
- Recharge of “holding accounts”, eg support services

A closing of the accounts timetable is issued by the Department of Finance (DF). This ensures that the Council has a co-ordinated approach and thereby closes its accounts usually by the end of May to meet statutory requirements.

Tony Howard 01603 222821  
John Marjoram 01603 223178

## Rights of access

*Continued from front page*

It could also include information on internal structures, key appointments and how key decisions are made.

A team is co-ordinating the project on behalf of Council departments to develop the publication scheme, which must specify:

- ◆ The classes of information that are available (eg corporate strategies)
- ◆ The manner in which this information will be published (eg on the Internet)
- ◆ Whether the information will be provided free of charge or any charges that will apply

If you currently produce information for the public you should ensure that your departmental Freedom of Information Act co-ordinator knows so that it can be included in the publication scheme. (Louise Chittock, 01603 224487, has the names of all co-ordinators)

If you comply with audit standards on retention of financial records you should be on the right path for compliance with the Act.

Schools will have to produce their own publication schemes and guidance will be sent to them at a later stage. Please contact Louise Chittock as above if you have any queries.

Michael Wood  
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