

Norfolk Matters

The Newsletter of Norfolk County Council



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Tax Rises **under scrutiny**

The independent Audit Commission has confirmed Norfolk County Council's assertions that lack of Government grant, not council profligacy, was the principal reason for this year's (2003-04) big increase in the Council Tax.

The Commission, which is responsible for ensuring that public money is spent wisely, also agreed that the transfer of Government grant to authorities in the midlands and north had increased the burden on counties such as Norfolk.

And when Councils turned to the Council Tax to make up the shortfall "fundamental problems with the way the Council Tax operates" meant that householders faced a four per cent increase in Council tax for every one per cent shortfall in Government grant.

The Commission found that increases in council spending were justifiable and often unavoidable, and included:

- Increases in pay and prices, National Insurance and pension costs;
- Higher demand for essential services, including care for a growing number of elderly people;
- National policy priorities, such as requirements to increase funding for schools or to meet

national waste recycling targets;

- Demanding standards set by inspectors and regulators without consideration of cost;
- Local priorities, and public expectation that services will improve.

In its recommendations the Commission calls for the Government to increase certainty about future grant distribution, and for Councils to ensure efficiency and carry out longer-term financial and service planning - a process that is well underway at Norfolk County Council.

The Commission's report says that a review that the Local Government Minister, Nick Raynsford, is chairing on the future funding of local government "needs to address fundamental flaws in the local tax system for councils to be able to fully engage citizens in key decisions that affect their lives".

- **The report is available at**
www.audit-commission.gov.uk

Funding boost welcome **but problems remain**



Norfolk County Council still faces difficult budget decisions, despite an announcement that the authority will receive an extra £4.2 million for 2004/5. The money is the council's share of additional funding for councils announced by Chancellor

Gordon Brown before Christmas.

Council Leader Alison King said the extra money was recognition that the Government funding fell far short of what was needed.

"We will put the extra money to good use. It will go a little way to help us close what remains a very substantial funding gap for next year. However, we

must keep this in perspective - £4.2 million pounds, though a lot of money, equates to an extra 0.4 % in terms of our gross budget and by itself, clearly won't solve all the problems we face.

"We want to keep council tax levels for next year as low as we possibly can, without cutting essential services. So, despite this extra settlement, we are still faced with huge problems. We are continuing our work to become more efficient and pin down further opportunities for saving money."

The full County Council will set the 2004/05 budget and county Council Tax on February 23rd.

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'Services not cuts'

says MORI poll

The majority of a representative sample of Norfolk people questioned in a MORI poll would prefer to pay slightly more Council Tax rather than see services cut.

The research, commissioned by the County Council, included a countywide poll of 2,500 people, and two follow up discussion days with residents broadly representing the demographic makeup of the county. People were asked if they would prefer

- An increase of 7% on Council Tax leading to cuts in County Council services of around £2.5million
- An increase of 8% to see services stay the same
- An increase of 9% to see an extra £2.5million go into services

In the poll 50% of respondents preferred either an 8 or 9% increase over 8% who preferred a 7% increase leading to a cut in services*.

In the two discussion days - one exclusively for older people - all age groups accepted that to make services better, spending needed to increase.

They decided an 8-9% increase would be acceptable, on the basis that:

- Council tax payers are told where the money is going
- They can see tangible results
- Key services improve.

The results of the poll, the two discussion days, and a further survey in Norfolk County Council's residents' magazine Your Norfolk were presented to Cabinet Members at their meeting on December 15th to feed into budget discussions.

**22% said they would prefer 'other' - generally increasing or decreasing spending on a particular service, 19% said 'none of these'.*

Norwich Bus Station

Planning permission has been granted for Norfolk County Council's new state-of-the-art bus station for Norwich.

The current Surrey Street site will close on Sunday January 25th to allow demolition work to begin, and it is hoped the new bus station will be open by Spring 2005.

All bus services from Surrey Street are being rerouted during construction. Full information will be available nearer the time from the Traveline Shop on Castle Meadow (0870 608 8 608); Norfolk County Council's Passenger Transport Unit (PTU) website www.passengertransport.norfolk.gov.uk, the PTU on 01603 223800; the bus station, bus stops on St Stephens, all the buses and Parish Councils affected by the closure, The Forum and County Hall.

The new bus station will have spaces for 12 buses and four long-distance coaches; a new travel office with seating, toilets and vending facilities; covered racks for cyclists and improved access for pedestrians.



NATS Update

More than 20,000 responses have been received to the major consultation on the Norwich Area Transportation Strategy (NATS).

The NATS consultation is gathering views on the future of transport in and around Norwich over the next 20 years, including plans for a Northern Distributor Road (NDR). The responses will now be analysed and a report and recommendations will be presented Cabinet in the Spring.



Norfolk Fire Service



Have Your Say...

**and help shape our future -
that's the clear message from
Norfolk Fire Service**

Across the UK the fire service as a whole is changing with the aim of improving public safety, and in Norfolk this is being seen as an exciting opportunity to make a safe county even safer.

The change is part of a major programme of national reform outlined in the Government's recent White Paper "Our Fire and Rescue Service".

In the new-look service there will be a stronger emphasis on the pro-active prevention work, already a major part of work with the community, while retaining the commitment to respond to emergencies.

The focus of fire cover will move from the current standards, set in the 1930's and focussing resources on buildings, to a new standard based on risk to human life - a switch of priorities from property to people, if you like.

The changes are designed to improve public safety by making sure the right resources are in the right place at the right time.

As a result all fire authorities are producing an Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) to show how they aim to deliver any necessary change within their area.

Norfolk's draft plan has been published and suggests a few important changes to the way in which fire cover is provided and a range of fire safety developments.

The plan is currently out to public consultation, which is a major part of the IRMP process, giving everyone the chance to shape their fire service for the future.

To find out more about what is being proposed and to have your say log on to the county council Intranet or Internet sites or to www.norfolkfireservice.co.uk.

Alternatively contact the IRMP team at Norfolk Fire Service Headquarters, Whitegates, Hethersett, Norwich, NR9 3DN, e-mail irmp@fire.norfolk.gov.uk, telephone 01603 810351 or fax 01603 812261.

Audit Commission's assessment ✓

The Audit Commission's assessment of Norfolk County Council, published in December, finds that it is a Good Authority, well placed to improve the services it provides for local people still further.

The County Council scored three out of four overall for its services, and four out of four for use of resources. Norfolk remains in the second highest category possible, but with a higher score than in the first assessment of performance in 2002.

Archive Centre Open

Norfolk's new Archive Centre, located next to County Hall, opened for business on Monday November 3.

The centre houses Norfolk Record Office and the East Anglian Film Archive. It will also be home to a new Norfolk Sound Archive. The entrance is through County Hall's former police training wing, which has been transformed to include an exhibition gallery and a conference and education suite.

Free parking is available and buses 58 and 58A and stop near the front door.

The Archive Centre is open Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm (open 9.30am on Tuesday) and Saturday 9am to 12noon

Norfolk Record Office tel. 01603 222599, fax 01603 761885, email norfrec@norfolk.gov.uk website <http://archives.norfolk.gov.uk>

East Anglian Film Archive tel. 01603 592664, fax 01603 593475, email eaafa@uea.ac.uk www.uea.ac.uk/eaafa



Your Norfolk **Your Say**

Watch out for the 'Your Norfolk, Your Say' consultation campaign, launched in January by the Norfolk County Strategic Partnership. As required by the Government, the Partnership, which includes Norfolk County Council, has developed a 20-year community strategy for Norfolk, called **Norfolk Ambition**. As part of this futuristic plan, the partnership has identified 3 major issues, and it wants to hear what Norfolk people have to say about them.

These three questions are:

- How can we improve transport and technology?
- How can we raise people's ambitions and help them to fulfil them?
- How can we make sure that everyone has a good quality of life, whether they live in a city, town or village?

You may have already been given the chance to have your say on local issues to help develop local community plans. 'Your Norfolk, Your Say' is different, though, as it looks at issues that can only be tackled by everyone across Norfolk working together.

All town and parish councils, and secondary schools, will automatically be sent a campaign pack, complete with postcards and posters.

If you are a group or organisation and would like a copy of the pack, or if you would like to find out more about the campaign, please log on to the **Norfolk Ambition** website at www.norfolkambition.gov.uk Alternatively, please call 0844 800 8020.

Please take the chance to add your voice to the debate, after all it's 'Your Norfolk, Your Say'.



Integrated Children's Services Planned

The County Council has agreed in principle to the integration of all services for children and young people under a new Director of Children's Services.

A decision on the responsibilities of the new role and the integration implementation programme, will be made in several months time, after a further period of research and the receipt of precise Government guidance.

Last September, the Government published its Green Paper, 'Every Child Matters', following the Laming Report on the death of Victoria Climbié.

In response, the County Council Cabinet asked Chief Executive, Tim Byles, to produce a report examining the opportunities for improvements in service delivery for children and young people. The Director of Children's Services post was a key recommendation of the report.

...Forward Plan.....Forward Plan.....Forward Plan

The County Council's Forward Plan is updated at the start of each month to show matters which are likely to be the subject of key decisions in the next 12 months. The plan, which can be viewed online at www.norfolk.gov.uk/council/forwardplan, outlines each subject, gives details of any consultation arrangements, when and where the decision is expected to be taken, and a contact name.

On January 19th, Cabinet is expected to consider the following:

Best Value Review on Supporting Independence. This review focused on what can be done to increase the number of people who can continue to live at home with the assistance of home care.

Contact

Laurie Ranger, Social Services, on 01603 222206
laurie.rainger@norfolk.gov.uk

School Funding 2004/ 5. A key part of the County Council's overall budget.

Contact

Paul Fisher, Head of Education Finance,
on 01603 223464 paul.fisher@norfolk.gov.uk

Review of School Organisation in the Norwich Area.

Cabinet will consider the outcome of public consultation and decide which option should be advertised in the formal public notice.

Contact

David Lennard Jones 01603 223474
david.lennard.jones@norfolk.gov.uk

Preferred Approach to Waste - Contract Strategy and Funding Options

Contact

Simon Pomfret, Project Manager (Waste),
01603 223253 simon.pomfret@norfolk.gov.uk

For consideration by Cabinet on February 2nd:

Recommendations to Council on the 2004-05 Revenue and Capital Budgets. Decisions will be made by Council on February 23rd.

Contacts

Bob Summers (revenue) 01603 222400.
bob.summers@norfolk.gov.uk

Mike Britch (capital) 01603 223448
mike.britch@norfolk.gov.uk

Transportation Capital Programme

Contact

Paul Elliott, Programme and Funding Manager,
01603 222210 paul.elliott@norfolk.gov.uk

Fair Access to Care.

A report by the Director of Social Services.

Contact

Laurie Rainger 01603 222206
laurie.rainger@norfolk.gov.uk

Integration of Occupational Therapy Equipment Services and an Equipment Demonstration Service

Contact

Sarah Ellis 01603 224216
sarah.ellis@norfolk.gov.uk

Other items due to come before Cabinet between January and March:

Approval of Trading Standards' Service Plan, incorporating the Food Law Enforcement Plan and Enforcement of Age Restricted Sales Plan

Contact

Steve Holland, Head of Trading Standards on
01603 223429 steve.holland@norfolk.gov.uk

Youth Service Plan

Contact

Graham Hanson
01603-224122
graham.hanson@norfolk.gov.uk

Norfolk Youth Justice Service Annual Plan update

Contact

Sue Massey, Head of Service, 01603 223617
sue.massey@norfolk.gov.uk



European Focus

Some 80% of the legislation that now affects us originates in Brussels. So, even for the most diehard Eurosceptics, it's time to focus on the importance of Europe in Norfolk's every day life.

The County Council has established a new approach to Europe headed by Jo Middleton, Corporate European Manager. The aim is to increase understanding of Europe and the opportunities to develop projects with EU partners.

Over the last five years, substantial sums of European money have flowed into the county for economic

regeneration schemes through programmes like Objective 2 and 3 and Leader+.

The focus from 2007 to 2012 is likely to be on transnational (INTERREG) projects, especially with countries from the EU's 2004 10-strong intake like Estonia, Hungary and Poland.

For further information on the County Council's approach to Europe contact Jo Middleton tel. 01603 222736 and for European funding opportunities contact Karen Gibson, European Funding Manager tel. 01603 222598.

Learning Lift-Off takes root

Charles Clarke, Secretary of State for Education, plants a beech sapling in the grounds of County Hall to mark the success of Learning Lift-Off, a home-grown learning initiative that has benefited some 700 front-line council workers in Norfolk. One of them - Cindy Bye - helped

the Secretary of State plant the tree to celebrate Learning Lift-Off's success in the Business in the Community (BITC) Awards - an accolade quickly followed by a high commendation in the National Training Awards.

Learning Lift-Off has been developed by NCS Ltd - Norfolk County Council's cleaning, catering, maintenance, transport and printing company - in collaboration with five Trade Unions and the Learning and Skills Council.

The beech sapling came from the Highgrove estate of the Prince of Wales, President of BITC.



£4 million transport boost

A £4 million reward for good performance has been earned by Norfolk County Council to boost transport improvements in the county in 2004-05.

The extra money is because the Council has proved to be among the best in the country for planning and delivering transport projects and will come to Norfolk as part of the Government's Local Transport Plan cash allocation for 2004-05. The performance bonus will mean:

- £500,000 more for road maintenance, bringing it up to £19.8 million. This is for major structural maintenance projects rather than day to day road maintenance.
- £3.5 million more for integrated transport, raising it to £13.2 million. This money is available to spend on a whole range of projects, from road safety schemes and minor road improvements to park and ride, pedestrian facilities and cycle routes.

Further details of the County Council's transportation projects for 2004-05 will be in the next edition of Norfolk Matters.

Supplier Support Scheme

Suppliers of all kinds of goods and services are keen to take advantage of the multi-million pound spending power of local authorities - but Norfolk County Council is becoming increasingly insistent that the companies it deals with have good environmental credentials.

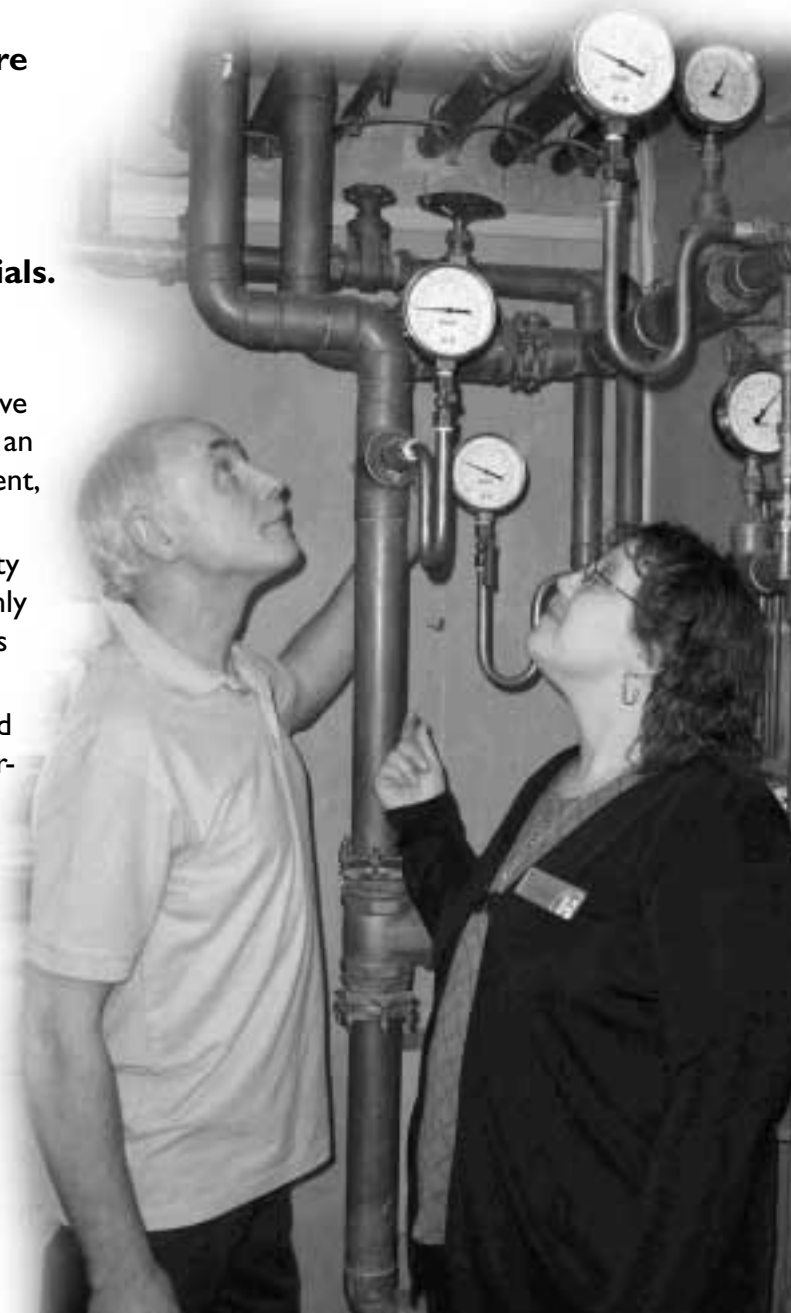
This can be a tall order for smaller companies, so the Council, with support from other agencies, has set up Supplier Support Scheme to help current and prospective suppliers make the grade. The project is already having an impact in a way that is not only good for the environment, but is also good for businesses' bottom line.

At Goodwins Hall Care Home, King's Lynn, a high-quality purpose-built 75-bed private care home that opened only three years ago, an energy audit identified annual savings of nearly £3,000 for an outlay of £830.

A water use audit is also likely to yield savings, and good environmental practice in other areas will ensure longer-term benefits - the reduction in waste through composting and the collection of recyclable materials will become even more important as further Landfill Tax rises push up disposal costs.

Vickie Hurlock, manager of Goodwins Hall, said: "It really does make sense to take advantage of the Supplier Support Scheme's expertise. Not only is it free, but it is helping us to reduce costs, as well as benefiting the environment."

The Supplier Support Team is based at Eco Tech, Swaffham, and can be contacted on 01760 726751.



A47 Dualling Alliance Launched

A new cross-party Alliance, including MPs, local authorities and the business community has been set up by the County Council to increase pressure on the Government to dual the A47. The A47 Alliance will also lobby in Europe.

The new move follows September's successful lobbying of David Jamieson, Under Secretary

of State for Transport, when the Minister did not entirely rule out the principle of dualling the road. Further encouragement came from Tom McNulty, Minister for Housing, Planning and Regeneration, when he attended the opening of the Hardwick flyover. He said that the county needed to keep pressing the case in every quarter and at every opportunity.

Visit Norfolk **Overhaul**

The county's main tourism website, www.visitnorfolk.co.uk has had a major overhaul thanks to a grant from the East of England Development Agency (EEDA).

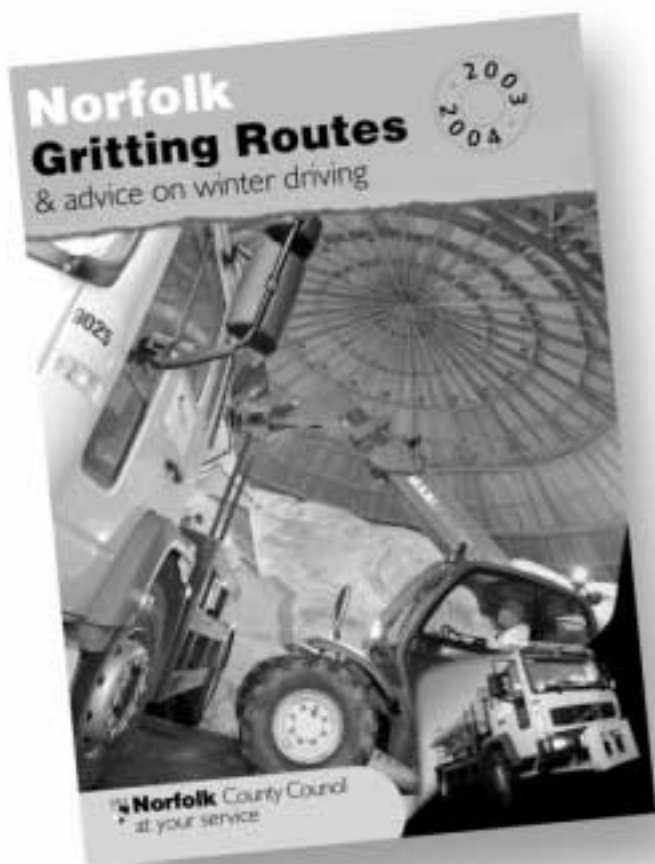
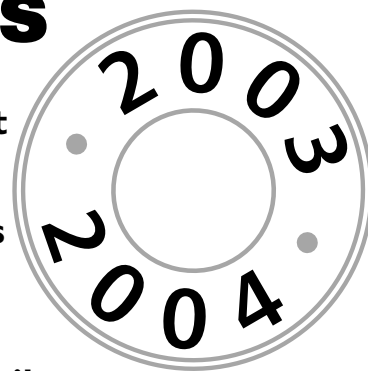
New features on the site include a searchable accommodation database that gives details of nearby attractions; 'tips from a local' - how to make the most of your break; and special themes like birdwatching, golfing, historic house, arts and crafts, gardens, walking and cycling.

Norfolk Gritting Routes

A new gritting routes and winter driving advice leaflet was published by the County Council in December.

The leaflet, which features a large map of the county's gritting routes and smaller maps of the main urban routes, is available from petrol stations and libraries.

In addition, a copy has been sent to each Parish Council.



Gritting Facts

- The County Council has a fleet of 56 dedicated salting vehicles
- Nine roadside weather stations operate from October 1 to April 30, providing 24-hour information for weather forecasters, to help highway engineers decide when action is needed to keep the roads safe.
- The County Council and Norwich City Council salt a priority network of 67 routes, which covers all the main traffic routes and provides a treated link from each village.
- Precautionary salting is carried out on 1920 miles of the County's 5920-mile highway network.
- The Highways Agency does precautionary salting on all 143 miles of trunk roads.

For more information visit www.norfolk.gov.uk and click on 'Transport and Streets', then 'Gritting'.

Severe Weather School Closures

The County Council has clear procedures to be followed when schools need to close due to severe weather.

Headteachers telephone a special school closures number, then County Council staff co-ordinate the details and inform local radio stations. Local radio is the key communication tool for informing parents.

In addition, a page on the Education Department website gives full details. Visit

<http://www.norfolkesinet.org.uk> and follow the link 'Emergency School Closures' in the 'See also' box.

If you would like 'Norfolk Matters' in large print, audio, Braille, alternative format or in a different language, please contact the Communications Unit on (01603) 222972 (minicom 223833)

