

Support the Giving Tree and bring festive joy to Norfolk's Children in Care

In the lead up to Christmas, Norfolk County Council Children's Services and Waterstones have teamed up again to launch the 2023 Giving Tree appeal, a Christmas project aimed at bringing joy to the county's children in care. This is now the 17th year the appeal has run, becoming more successful and reaching more children every year. Last year's appeal saw more than 1000 books bought and delivered to children in care across Norfolk.

The tree, based at the Castle Street branch in Norwich, will be decorated with hundreds of tags which each represent a child and the book they would like to receive for Christmas. There are requests for books from more than 800 Norfolk children in care, with some specifying books or authors and others seeking a certain genre or type of book.

Please note all books must be purchased by Sunday 3rd December so they reach children in time for Christmas!

Twenty-seven brand new gritters to join Norfolk's fleet

Twenty-seven brand new gritters will be taking to the roads for the first time later this winter in a £3,238,000 boost to the annual push to help keep Norfolk moving safely during the winter months.

The news comes as crews completed their first gritting runs of the season at the weekend, treating routes in the west, inland north and south and east coast areas of the county.

Norfolk's fleet of 58 winter vehicles treat 2,200 miles of roads on each full 3-hour gritting run. All A and B-class roads and some C-class roads are treated with a focus on commuter and major bus routes and as far as is possible one route into all villages. The A11 and A47 are gritted by National Highways.

In addition to the 49 gritting routes, a number of pedestrian areas and main pavements are treated in the centre of Norwich, Great Yarmouth and King's Lynn, and more than 2000 grit bins are available around the county for people to use on roads, pavements and cycle paths.

Find more information via www.norfolk.gov.uk/winter

Additional information

Norfolk spends an average of £3.2m each year keeping highways moving over the winter.

The average cost of each full gritting run is around £49,000.

Approximately 15,000 tonnes of salt is held in salt barns across the county, which will be restocked regularly throughout the winter season.

Tis the season to... plan your journeys

Whether you're heading home late from the Festive Lights Switch-On or want to find cycling and walking routes to burn off some of those seasonal treats, the Travel Norfolk website is here to help you plan your journeys this Christmas.

With local, accurate and real-time public transport information, the site offers a one-stop shop for people wanting travel information for Norfolk and finding a travel mode to suit them. Whether it's using the five handy park & ride sites, using one of the many recently extended bus services across the county or wanting to find cycle parking or cycle share bays close to where they are going – Travel Norfolk has it all.

For those needing to head to the city by car, there's now also the option to show live parking information for Norwich's main multistorey car parks, helping Christmas shoppers to see where spaces are available during peak times. Simply click on the key on the site's journey planner map and select from a range of useful information – as well as parking spaces, you can quickly and easily locate the nearest Beryl docking station, vehicle charging point, taxi rank or toilet facilities.

The journey planner was also recently updated to allow people searching for journeys in the Greater Norwich area to see Beryl bikes and e-scooters and for those living in Great Yarmouth, the Ginger e-scooters are offered as a travel option.

The journey planner continues to develop with even more capability coming soon, including park & ride journeys and multi-modal options.

To find out more about more about the journey planner and to plan your festive journeys, visit travelnorfolk.co.uk/festivetravel.

More people 'choose the bus' in Norfolk after first year of bus service improvement plan

It's been just over a year since Norfolk County Council received £49.55m of funding from the Department for Transport (DfT) to improve bus services across the county. There have been huge numbers of improvements already made across the county, and the latest figures show that passenger numbers have increased throughout the year with the number of fare-paying passengers now exceeding pre-covid levels.

Passenger numbers across the UK fell dramatically during the covid-19 pandemic with an average drop across the UK of 50.3% but in many areas even more.

Latest figures for Norfolk show that overall bus passenger numbers have increased by 18% in the last year with the number of fare-paying passengers now at 107% compared to pre-pandemic baseline figures. Norfolk is bucking the trend as nationally bus usage figures are at between 89% to 98% of pre-pandemic levels*.

Concessionary pass holders, who have been the slowest to return to using the bus since the pandemic, are now at 83% of pre-pandemic levels and have increased by more than 12% since January this year.

Norfolk received the sixth highest allocation in the country and the funding consists of £30.9m of capital funding and £18.6m of revenue funding.

Approximately £12 million of the funding was allocated to providing new or expanded bus routes and increased service frequencies on key routes, including more evening and weekend services and this has been very much the focus of the spend in this first year of funding.

- A total of 31 enhancements have been made to services this year bringing more regular bus services to 93 parishes with a population of more than 306,000 people.
- There are now more evening services on key routes across 21 parishes in the county including to Dereham, Watton, Thorpe St Andrew and Horsford.
- 49 parishes have an improved Saturday service while 5 parishes are benefitting from improved Sunday services.

In addition to the service enhancements year one of delivering the bus service improvement plan for the county has also seen the following infrastructure improvements.

- The first Travel Norfolk Travel Hub opened in North Walsham providing improved waiting areas with real-time information and integration with walking and cycling facilities.

- A county-wide review of bus stops has started with stops in Hunstanton and Swaffham and Hellesdon being upgraded to our new gold standard.
- 84 accessible bus stop boarding points have been delivered countywide.

Bus travel has also become cheaper this year and offers great value for money thanks not only to the Government fare cap which most operators in Norfolk have signed up to but also 4 local fares offers delivered thanks to the bus service improvement plan:

- £1.50 flat fares for King's Lynn
- £1.50 flat fares for Thetford
- 25% off group, weekly and monthly tickets
- Reduced park & ride fares

*taken from DfT Usage of transport by mode report

Urgent funding needed to support school transport for children with special educational needs

Norfolk County Council is backing a call from the County Council's Network (CCN) for an urgent cash injection to support home to school transport.

In a new report, published ahead of the autumn statement, the CCN lays bare the huge financial pressures councils are facing in their transport budgets – particularly large, rural councils like Norfolk.

The report, "From home to the classroom: making travel to schools services sustainable," details how councils are increasingly having to use taxis and other high-cost transport to take children with special educational needs and disabilities to school, partly due to increasingly complex needs and growing demand for specialist places.

The CCN is calling for extra funding to support councils and reforms to home to school transport policy from government.

Norfolk County Council will spend about £60m on home to school transport for children this year, up from £51m in 2022/23. Nearly £40m of that spending will be on children with special educational needs and disabilities, with an average cost of £9,730 per child with SEND.

The council has already committed investment of £120m in extra specialist school places, including new special schools and specialist resource bases, with more places planned in the coming years. Additionally, it is working with the DfE on a further £100m programme (Local First Inclusion) to increase provision and provide more support in mainstream schools.

The extra specialist capacity will help reduce the distance that children need to travel, whilst aiming to bring Norfolk's high needs special educational needs spending back to balance.

However, demand for home to school transport is expected to continue to increase.

[View the full report on the County Councils Network website.](#)

Next steps for the Norwich Western Link to be considered by Cabinet

A report recommending that a major infrastructure project for Norfolk progresses to crucial next steps in its development will be considered by Norfolk County Council's Cabinet early next month.

Planning application documents for the Norwich Western Link, a new 3.9 mile dual carriageway road to the west of the city, have been under development for several months. Subject to the necessary internal approvals being given, the council would intend to submit the planning application early next year.

The revised budget for the project is now £273.9m, an increase of £22.8m from the previous budget agreed in July 2022, which could increase the local contribution towards the project by £22.9m. However, the Department for Transport (DfT) have indicated that they could provide funding of up to 100% of the costs set out at OBC stage, which stood at £251.1m. If the government provided £251.1m of funding, the local contribution required towards the overall cost of the project would be less than previously anticipated even with the overall budget increase.

Discussions with the DfT around their increased contributions are expected to take place in the coming weeks and months. In the meantime, DfT have already committed to providing £24m from their contribution to the County Council, which is funding the development of the project.

Members of the County Council's cabinet will be asked to approve various recommendations linked to the Norwich Western Link's planning application, Side Roads Order and Compulsory Purchase Order when they meet on Monday 4 December. They will also be asked to recommend the increased budget and local contribution for approval by Full Council, when it meets in January 2024.

Annual awards recognise dozens of outstanding contributions to Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service

Achievements including saving a village from the clutches of wildfire, helping transport a horse mannequin called Brandy, and restoring a fire station flower garden, all received recognition at the Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service Annual Staff Awards.

The ceremony recognised the efforts of fire fighters, fire staff, their friends and families and community partners and volunteers, showing how everyone has a unique part to play in to make in making the service great.

A total of 16 awards were given in nine categories: Cadet of the Year – Charlie Mirfin of Hunstanton Fire Cadets; On-Call Employers of the Year – Howdens and MN Landscapes; Fundraiser of the Year – Wymondham Watch Manager Tom Diaper; Volunteer of the Year - Dylan Steggles of Hingham; Making a Difference Award – Watch Manager Michelle Lowe, Chris Baker, Let's Talk Mental Health team, and Blue Watch King's Lynn; Partnership Award - Redwings Horse Sanctuary, Inspirational Leader Award – Western Group Manager David Copeland and Prevention Manager Llio Wyn Knight-Griffith; New Employees of the Year Award - Lucy Goldsmith and Jessica Graves; and Team Achievement Award – Crucial Crew and Payroll team.

For more on the individual stories of these awards, which were sponsored by Norfolk Safety CIC and Brancaster Parish Council, [visit our Facebook page](#).

Winter campaign launched to support residents in Norfolk and Waveney to stay Warm and Well

Supported by local health and care organisations in Norfolk and Waveney the latest Warm and Well Campaign is being launched to help us all stay as well as possible during the cold months ahead.

The campaign encourages Norfolk and Waveney residents to “winter proof” their health and wellbeing by preparing for winter illnesses and reminding people what to do if they do fall ill.

Additionally, the campaign aims to support people to who may be struggling to pay bills or heat their home this winter by raising awareness of the wide range of winter hardship support that is available locally.

The Warm and Well campaign promotes some of the essential ways that residents can stay healthy, warm, and well this winter, including:

- Getting their flu and COVID-19 vaccinations as soon as they're offered them
- Keeping themselves well this winter by staying warm, keeping active, and keeping a well-stocked medicine cabinet so they are prepared for common winter illnesses
- Advice for people who look after someone at home and how to set up an emergency carer plan
- Signposting people to the hardship support that is available and providing tips on how to make homes more energy efficient.
- Encouraging use of the NHS 111 service, community pharmacies, Minor Injuries Units, and GP practice services instead of going to A&E
- Supporting people to look after their mental health

People can find all the information they need by [visiting the Norfolk and Waveney Winter Well online portal](#).