

East Anglian counties partner with US city for mutual business and economic growth

The counties of Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex are partnering with Virginia Beach, a US city with booming technology and renewables sectors, to boost transatlantic trade and cooperation through a new Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). Virginia Beach is the largest city in Virginia, about the size of Bristol, halfway down the US East Coast.

The MOU was signed on 12 November at the US Embassy in London by the three County Council Leaders: Norfolk's Kay Mason Billig, Suffolk's Matthew Hicks, and Essex's Kevin Bentley. Signing for Virginia Beach was the City's Deputy City Manager, Amanda Jarratt.

Further details are available [here](#).

Norfolk Libraries - support for starting a business

On Tuesday 19 November, the British Library's Business & IP Centres (BIPC) at libraries across the country, including Norfolk, will be taking part in Start-up Day, with activities, networking sessions and streamed talks.

As part of Global Entrepreneurship Week, there will be free events to inspire pre-starts, start-ups and existing small businesses.

At the Millennium Library in Norwich, the afternoon will start with an introduction to BIPC Norfolk and how the centre can offer help with getting your business off the ground, as well as ongoing support for small businesses.

Activities include a range of free talks, networking, and a live screening from the British Library's Inspiring Entrepreneurs event featuring TV Dragon Sara Davies MBE.

Further information and a link to the free start-up day event is available [here](#).

Norfolk street lighting goes green

A project to upgrade street lighting across Norfolk to make it more energy efficient and environmentally friendly has been completed almost a year ahead of schedule. The change will see CO2 emissions on lighting maintained by Norfolk County Council cut by over 200 tonnes a year.

Further information is available in our press release [here](#).

Norfolk 2025 Commemorations - open to applications

At the September meeting of the Norfolk Covenant, the Board decided to establish a fund to enable community organisations to apply for up to £500 to commemorate the 80th anniversaries of VE and VJ Day next year.

The Fund is open to any non-profit groups including constituted voluntary and community groups; Parish and Town Councils; charities; churches; social enterprises; community interest companies; cadet groups, and schools and nurseries.

The Fund will consider a wide range of projects specific to the commemoration of military events, which may include but are not exclusive to:

- Community events and commemorations, including street parties
- Dance, drama and art projects
- Local military and social history research projects
- Educational activities

All the information about the fund can be found here: [Norfolk Armed Forces Covenant 2025 Commemoration Fund | Norfolk Community Foundation](#).

The deadline for applications is 12 noon on 9 December 2024.

Norfolk team wins national awards

Norfolk County Council's People from Abroad Team has won the Overall Social Worker of the Year award and gold Team of the Year award in the Children's Services category (including MDTs), after beating competition from across the country.

The team, which has helped more than 500 people to date, supports children and families in need, as well as adults who struggle to access traditional services due to their immigration status; resettled refugee families; and families who have no recourse to public funds.

In recent years, the team has faced significant demand for its services. During the COVID-19 pandemic, it stepped in to provide support for over 100 asylum seekers placed at the first contingency accommodation in the East of England. Following the fall of Afghanistan to the Taliban, it received as many families for resettlement as possible. It has also housed and supported Ukrainian families who are dealing with the effects of trauma.

National updates

Flooding reforms

The government has [announced flooding reforms](#) that it says will bolster England's resilience to flooding through additional financial support to farmers and rural communities, as well as refreshing its approach to delivering funding to make sure it works for communities.

Recognising the significant impact of flooding on farmers, an additional £50 million will be distributed to internal drainage boards (IDBs), the public bodies responsible for managing water levels for agricultural and environmental needs in a particular area.

Additionally, the government announced that a consultation will be launched in the New Year which will include a review of the existing funding formula for allocating money to flood defences. They say that this will ensure that the challenges facing businesses and rural and coastal communities are adequately taken into account when delivering flood protection.

The government also confirmed that payments to farmers impacted by last year's severe weather through the Farming Recovery Fund, these payments are expected to be made to farmers from 21 November 2024.

Council Tax cap

The government has confirmed that council tax rises will be kept at the 5% cap next year.

The prime minister's press secretary said that the threshold by which local authorities can increase bills would "remain the same" as it is now.

The Local Government Association (LGA) notes that one in four councils said in an LGA survey that they were "likely" to need emergency support to prevent bankruptcy in the next two years, so maximum increases in council tax are believed to be likely.

New National Youth Strategy

Culture Secretary Lisa Nandy [has unveiled plans for a new National Youth Strategy](#) designed to put the views of young people at the centre of decision-making on policies that affect them.

The Government says young people will be invited to be part of a national conversation to help co-produce the Strategy to unlock opportunities in every community. The Strategy will prioritise delivering better coordinated youth services and policy at a local, regional and national level. It will make sure decision-making moves away from a one-size-fits all approach, handing power back to young people and their communities, and rebuilding a thriving and sustainable sector.

As part of this shift in strategy, the Culture Secretary confirmed in the House of Commons the decision to wind down the National Citizen Service (NCS) programme from March 2025.

In its place, the Government will set up a Local Youth Transformation pilot, to help rejuvenate councils' youth services, and expand the Creative Careers Programme to give young people new opportunities to get into careers in the arts.

The new strategy is expected to be published next year.

NHS rolls out 'stop-smoking' pill to help tens of thousands quit

The head of the health service [says thousands of lives could be saved thanks to the roll-out of an improved anti-smoking pill on the NHS in England](#)

Varenicline has been shown to work as well as vapes to help people stop smoking and be a more effective aid than nicotine-replacement gum or patches. The daily pill is now set to be offered by the NHS to tens of thousands of smokers each year in England to provide another option to help them quit.

Each year the NHS spends around £2.5 billion on treating health issues caused by smoking – it is the leading cause of preventable illness and deaths, causing more than seven in 10 lung cancers and increasing the risk of many major health conditions, such as strokes, diabetes, heart disease, stillbirth and dementia.

Varenicline is being offered in conjunction with pharmacy and council-led stop smoking services across the country, with smokers wanting to quit able to self-refer to these services by visiting the NHS Better Health website.

The drug works by reducing cravings for nicotine and blocking its effect on the brain, while also helping with withdrawal symptoms such as feeling irritable or having difficulty sleeping.

(Norfolk County Council's [Ready to Change](#) pages provide more information and help to quit smoking and specialist support is available through [Smokefree Norfolk](#) which is endorsed by the NHS and Norfolk County Council.).

NHS "ping and book" system to increase access to cancer screening for women

The [NHS say they are set to revolutionise access to cancer screening for women](#) in a major drive to boost uptake and save thousands of lives.

From next month, the NHS will begin to roll out a new "ping and book" service, alerting the phones of women to remind them they are due or overdue an appointment, with new functionality being developed to enable millions to book screening through the NHS App next year.

The NHS says that the roll out through the NHS App will replace costs of letters and text messages with pop-ups on your phone and help make it as convenient as possible to book appointments.

Closure of the Office for Place

The [Office for Place will be closed down](#) and the expertise of its staff redeployed within the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government across the country, where support for design and placemaking will continue.

The decision was announced through a Written Ministerial Statement on 12 November 2024: [Written statements - Written questions, answers and statements - UK Parliament](#).