

Norfolk County Council updates 20/03/2025

Region's aviation ambitions signalled during Dutch Ambassador's visit

Ambitions for Norfolk to become the country's leading region for aviation innovation and the first Aviation Development Zone were signalled as the Dutch Ambassador to the UK made a prestigious two-day visit.

Paul Huijts was visiting Saxon Air in Norwich where he learned about the county's aspirations around the development of Advanced Air Mobility – small, sustainable and highly efficient air vehicles for short and medium-range travel, which can offer on-demand services, and take off and land in small, decentralised zones.

The vision is for Norfolk and Suffolk to lead the way in its development and become the UK's first Aviation Development Zone.

Significant milestone marked in work on Fred Nicholson School

A significant milestone has been marked in the expansion and relocation of the Fred Nicholson School as pupils visited the new site and took part in a ceremonial steel signing.

The school is moving from its current location in Dereham to a new site on Lynn Road, Swaffham, to better accommodate its growing number of pupils.

Fred Nicholson provides a nurturing and inclusive environment for children and young people, aged 7 to 16 with special educational needs and disabilities. The school's relocation, part of Norfolk County Council's multi-million pound Local First Inclusion (LFI) programme, means the number of pupils will grow from 197 to 224.

The new site features a three-storey building with 17 main classrooms, providing comprehensive special school education and dedicated areas for sixth form and Autism provision. The school also has specialist teaching areas for life skills, sensory immersion, and sensory and physical development.

The relocated school is due to open in spring 2026.

National updates

School absence and the 'disadvantage gap'

The latest [report](#) by the Education Policy Institute (EPI) – which looks at pupil performance after the Covid 19 pandemic has found that unauthorised school absence is a leading cause of the widening performance gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers in England. The research suggests that the increase in the 'disadvantage gap' among 16-year-olds since 2019 can be explained by pupils on free school meals missing more time at school than other pupils, putting them several months behind in terms of their results. The EPI calculates that if disadvantaged pupils had the same attendance record as other pupils, the attainment gap at age 11 would be almost 10% smaller, with the gap at age 16 being 20% smaller.

The government has set a 2028 target for 75% of children – up from 68% - to reach a good level of development by the time they leave reception.

Road maintenance report

A new [report](#) by the Asphalt Industry Alliance (AIA) which surveys local authorities in England and Wales annually to monitor the state of the road network has found that almost one-sixth of local roads (equivalent to nearly 35,000 miles) will need re-laying within five years to bring them up to 'ideal' conditions – at a cost of almost £17bn (the highest figure in 30 years of reporting).

Benefit reforms announcement

The Work and Pensions Secretary, Liz Kendall, has [announced](#) an overhaul of the UK's benefits system as part of plans to cut the government's welfare expenditure in the face of current and predicted rising demand. The changes announced include a rise in universal credit, people being given the right to try returning to work without putting their benefits at risk, and a narrowing of the eligibility for daily living element of Personal Independence Payments (PIP), which is likely to affect about 1 million people. Kendall stressed that there would be no reassessment for people with the most severe disabilities and that she would fundamentally overhaul the DWP's safeguarding approach.

Additionally, the government will consult on merging jobseeker's allowance and employment support allowance into a time-limited 'unemployment insurance'.

As part of the package, the government will be spending up to £1bn a year extra on helping people back into work, with plans ranging from supportive calls to intensive training programmes. Kendall confirmed that these current reforms will save more than £5bn by 2029-30. The Office for Budget Responsibility will publish its assessment of the savings next week, alongside the spring statement (26 March).