

Norfolk County Council Updates – 05-12-25

Government decision to postpone mayoral elections

Issued on behalf of the Leader of Norfolk County Council

The Government announced it is delaying the mayoral elections in Norfolk and Suffolk and three other areas in the devolution priority programme, from May 2026 to May 2028.

You can read the full statement from Secretary of State Steve Reed, here: [Written statements - Written questions, answers and statements - UK Parliament](#).

The Government says that the delay is intended to give councils time to complete preparations for local government reorganisation and the introduction of unitary authorities in 2028.

Norfolk and Suffolk County Councils have been making extensive preparations for the mayoral elections and for the launch of the County Combined Authority next spring. They were ready to hit the ground running and start to deliver for the people of Norfolk and Suffolk.

The news is, therefore, extremely disappointing. We are seeking answers for what this means for our well-advanced plans to set up the County Combined Authority and deliver the investment and powers that we were promised.

Further updates will be provided as we receive more detail from the Government and work through the implications.

Norfolk and Suffolk Music Hub: Young Ambassadors Programme

The Norfolk and Suffolk Music Hub, led by Norfolk County Council, has secured a second year of funding for its Ambassadors Programme. The funding will enable the Hub to offer the programme to a new cohort of young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) while introducing new opportunities for previous participants to return as peer mentors. Last year, 37 young people completed the programme, this year, 70 will take part, supported by returning ambassadors. The programme offers music related work placements to boost confidence and develop skills.

Norfolk County Council was appointed by Arts Council England to lead the Norfolk and Suffolk Music Hub from September 2024, as part of a national programme delivering high-quality music education for all children and young people.

Connect to Work employment support

People in Norfolk with disabilities and long-term health issues that are keeping them out of employment are to receive support from the newly launched Connect to Work programme which will support more than 4,000 people facing barriers to employment. The programme is funded by the UK Government.

Connect to Work aims to build on the achievements of the previous Working Well Norfolk and Local Supported Employment projects and reduce the county's higher than average economically inactive population. It is aimed at people aged 18 and over from Norfolk (and 16-17 in some cases) including people with mental and physical health challenges, learning disabilities, neurodiversity, care leavers, carers, military veterans, ex-offenders, the homeless, refugees and victims of domestic abuse. People who are in work but at risk of having to give up due to their health condition or other complex challenges will also be assisted.

Find out how to access support via Connect to Work [here](#).

Support for those at risk of redundancy

Norfolk County Council is piloting a new integrated support package in response to a report warning of up to 15,000 potential redundancies in the county over the next few years. The 12-month pilot will create an online portal for businesses and employees to access local and national redundancy support. Individuals needing more tailored help will be referred to specialist teams for bespoke support.

The scheme will be reviewed during the pilot and may continue after local government reorganisation, depending on demand.

Further details and access information will be shared via council channels as the scheme develops.

First Red Plaque in Norfolk honours firefighter

Thirty-eight years after Norfolk firefighter Christopher Betts tragically lost his life fighting a blaze at The Chequers pub in Hainford, a Red Plaque has been unveiled at the site in his memory. The plaque is part of a scheme by the Fire Brigades Union to recognise those who have lost their lives in the line of duty. Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service, his family and Norfolk Fire Museum have worked with the union to have this, the first one in Norfolk, installed.

Further details are available in our news release [here](#).

First trees planted at new woodland project

Pupils from St Germans Academy teamed up with local councillors as part of National Tree Week to begin creating the new woodland for the Wiggshall St Germans Woodland Project which will eventually feature more than 40,000 trees. Planting will continue through to Spring 2026, with public access planned for Summer 2026, including paths for walking and exploring. The Wiggshall St Germans Woodland Project is part of Norfolk County Council's "1 Million Trees for Norfolk" initiative.

For more information about the 1 Million Trees for Norfolk initiative and how to get involved, visit www.norfolk.gov.uk/milliontrees.

Avian Flu update

Great Britain is still in an avian influenza prevention zone (AIPZ). All bird keepers (whether they have pet birds, commercial flocks or just a few birds in a backyard flock) are required by law to take biosecurity precautions.

A further outbreak of HPAI H5N1 has been confirmed in large commercial premises at a second premises near Munford, Breckland. A 3km protection zone and 10km surveillance zone have been declared around the premises.

Norfolk Trading Standards works with colleagues from the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) to support local businesses and to minimise the risk of the outbreak spreading.

Links to government updates are available on the county council's trading standards web pages [here](#).

National Updates

English Devolution & Empowerment Bill

The First Reading of the [English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill](#) in the Lords took place on 27 November. This stage signalled the start of the bill's journey through the Lords.

The Second Reading in the House of Lords, a general debate on all aspects of the bill, is currently scheduled for Monday 8 December.

Town centre action on crime

A nationwide crackdown on crime and anti-social behaviour this winter [has been launched](#) as police, councils and businesses united to protect shoppers, retail workers, and Christmas revellers. To keep communities safe over the busy Christmas period, police will use hotspot patrols, quick visible enforcement, and locally tailored approaches, working closely with businesses and community groups to clamp down on shop theft and street crime across hundreds of town centres.

Online access to GPs

The [Department for Health and Social Care says](#) that patients at nearly all GP practices in England can now access their surgery online and that for the first time the ONS Health Insights Survey shows that of those who completed the survey, more contacted their GP practice online than by phone.

Integrated Care Boards review compliance routinely, and the NHS continues to provide support for the minority of practices yet to fully implement online consultation.

Unregistered care homes

[Ofsted's annual report](#) has found that nine in 10 councils across England are having to place children in unregistered care homes, which can charge up to £30,000 per week. The annual report looks at schools, early years, further education and skills and children's social care for the academic year 2024 to 2025.

The report finds great work being done by education and care professionals but there are concerns about the rapid growth in children's homes, and outcomes for disadvantaged and vulnerable children remain poorer than their peers.

The LGA said that "astronomical costs" of children's homes means there is less money to help children before they reach care, and that "in many cases, a lack of choice means provision is not fully meeting children's needs".

Concerns related to use of social media by young people

[Ofsted's annual report](#) also highlights the key role that the technology plays in driving poor behaviour in schools.

Additionally, [A new analysis by the Centre for Social Justice](#) has found that over 800,000 children aged three to five in the UK are engaging with social media, raising concerns about what they are exposed to online and prompting calls for a public health campaign to highlight the risks