

**County Councillor Report from Cllr Julie Costley for Parish Councils of:
Docking, Sedgeford, Heacham, Snettisham, The Birchams, The Rudhams**

June 2026

1) The AGM was held on 28th May. Cllr Julian Kirk was elected as Chair of the County Council and Cllr Mike Westman as vice-chair. Councillors from all parties paid tribute to the outgoing chair, Tom FitzPatrick. Cllr David Bick was elected as Leader of the Council and Robin Hunter-Clarke as Deputy Leader.

Details of the appointments to Cabinet and Committees are on the Norfolk County Council (NCC) website. Cabinet are meeting on 29th June to set the priorities.

2) Local Government Reorganisation (LGR). On 3rd June 2026 the Reform UK deputy leader of Norfolk County Council, Cllr Robin Hunter-Clarke, wrote to the Secretary of State formally stating the administration's position on LGR. This follows the issuing of a pre-action protocol letter in May 2026 setting out our concerns that the decision is unlawful. His letter states:

"1. There is no public mandate for this change

During the recent local election campaign, residents across Norfolk consistently expressed opposition to the abolition of district councils and the break-up of the county. They were clear that they did not wish to see scarce public resources diverted into structural reorganisation at the expense of local services. The election results provide little evidence of support for the Government's proposals. Labour secured just one of the 84 seats on Norfolk County Council and lost control of Norwich City Council. While elections are influenced by many factors, these outcomes cannot reasonably be interpreted as an endorsement of local government reorganisation. We also note the limited response to the Government's consultation. Only 1,737 out of 940,000 Norfolk residents participated. This falls far short of demonstrating a meaningful public mandate for a fundamental restructuring of local government.

2. The costs are unaffordable and the savings uncertain

The business case estimates a one-off implementation cost of £96 million, with any savings not expected to offset those costs for several years. The fundamental issue is that there is no identified funding source for this expenditure. The Government's proposed contribution of £2.7 million leaves Norfolk taxpayers exposed to a funding gap of more than £93 million. At the same time, Norfolk County Council is already managing significant financial pressures. Even after delivering £18.6 million of planned savings in 2027/28, the council is forecasting a budget gap is more than £34 million, with further pressures expected in subsequent years. The debt inherited from the Conservative administration is £900 million. We are unconvinced by the projected savings set out in the business case. The council has previously highlighted significant weaknesses in the underlying assumptions and questioned whether many of the claimed efficiencies are achievable. Norfolk residents should not be expected to fund an unwanted reorganisation that risks reducing local services while providing uncertain financial benefits.

3. The timetable is unrealistic and creates unnecessary and unprecedented risk

The scale of the programme that the Government is seeking to deliver is unprecedented. Restructuring local government across multiple areas simultaneously will place significant pressure on the capacity of councils, suppliers and regulators. We have been advised that key digital and technology providers may not have sufficient capacity to support the number of reorganisations proposed within the Government's

timetable. This risks either substantial additional costs or delays to implementation. There are also serious concerns about the impact on frontline services. Particularly concerning is the risk to Norfolk's Children's Services which have recently been rated as Outstanding. We should not place crucial high-performing services at unnecessary risk in pursuit of a structural change that lacks both public support and a compelling business case. In summary, we do not believe there is a public mandate for these proposals, a credible financial case for implementation, or a realistic timetable for delivery. Given these concerns, I want to leave no doubt about the strength of this administration's opposition to local government reorganisation in Norfolk.

We intend to pursue all lawful and appropriate avenues to challenge these proposals and to preserve the existing two-tier system. Accordingly, the administration will not support work to implement LGR in Norfolk in advance of any Structural Changes Order being enacted, nor will we participate in voluntary implementation arrangements, including voluntary Joint Committees. I urge you to reconsider these proposals and to act in the best interests of Norfolk residents by withdrawing the requirement for local government reorganisation in our county."

As your County Councillor I will keep Parish Council updated on this matter.

3) Norfolk County Council - supporting carers week 8-14 June 2026

[Carers Week](#) is a national campaign recognising the contribution unpaid carers make to families, communities and public services. For Norfolk County Council, it is also an opportunity to highlight the importance of unpaid carers in supporting residents across the county and the value of helping carers identify themselves and access support earlier.

Norfolk County Council supports colleagues and unpaid carers through local awareness and support, including the [Norfolk Carers Charter](#), developed jointly by councillors and carers, and the [Carer Friendly Tick Award](#).

4) Children's Services in Norfolk judged outstanding across the board

Children's Services in Norfolk has been rated outstanding in all areas in its latest Ofsted inspection. It is now one of the top performing Children's Services departments in the country. Further information is available on the NCC website.

5) Reporting potholes

Norfolk County Council encourages councillors and residents to report potholes directly to the county council. During the reporting process, you can also see on a map whether a pothole has already been reported by someone else. The reporting form can be accessed at www.norfolk.gov.uk/potholes

By reporting potholes to the county council online, you can:

Track the progress of your report

- Receive automatic email updates
- Log an issue while you are out and about
- Upload photos to help us assess the problem

During the summer, the county council carries out preventative work, known as surface dressing. This gives roads a new seal, to prevent potholes forming, and provides a new, skid-resistant surface to reduce the risk of accidents. This year, we are treating 351 miles of roads. The work continues until September. Further information is available on NCC website.

6) Keeping safe on or near water

Recent national coverage about the risks of outdoor swimming provides a timely opportunity to highlight Norfolk County Council's role in promoting water safety locally.

In Norfolk, this is particularly relevant given the county's 91 miles of coastline and more than 200 miles of inland waterways.

National water safety experts have recently warned about the dangers of swimming in open water following a number of drownings across the UK, as people sought to cool off during May's heatwave. The [UK's National Water Safety Forum](#) also released data showing that water-related deaths increased in May and remained high through the summer, with more than half of incidents taking place in inland waterways rather than on the coast.

In Norfolk, the County Council works with partners through Norfolk's Water Safety Forum to help prevent incidents, reduce risk and raise public awareness about staying safe in and around open water.

Further information and advice on staying safe on or near water can be found on the NCC website.

7) Finalists in Norfolk Rural Business Awards announced

Norfolk Rural Business Awards are organised by Norfolk County Council in partnership with the Royal Norfolk Agricultural Association to showcase a wide range of our best businesses, community groups and people. The finalists were announced on 12 May - further information is available on NCC website.

8) Norfolk and Suffolk at the UKREiiF

Norfolk & Suffolk recently attended the UK's Real Estate Investment and Infrastructure Forum (UKREiiF) with a joint investment offer showcasing more than 60 development and regeneration opportunities for potential investors. Over 16,000 investors, developers, local authorities and partners came together from across the UK's real estate and infrastructure sectors. With a dedicated Norfolk & Suffolk Pavilion and packed schedule of events, the region was able to showcase what makes it stand out from other areas.

[Norfolk Business Board](#) Chair Nick Steven-Jones attended alongside representatives from across the public and private sectors. Further information is available on NCC website.

9) Childcare costs

The [Government has announced](#) new action on hidden childcare charges, including a request for the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) to examine fees such as deposits, compulsory add-ons and additional hours linked to funded childcare places. The Government says these costs are preventing some families from accessing the support they are entitled to. Nearly three

quarters (72%) of parents say they are using savings to cover extra charges, while more than one in four (27%) say cost remains the biggest barrier to accessing the childcare they need.

The Government has also launched a new free cost of living tool at www.childcare.beststartinlife.gov.uk to help parents understand what childcare support they can access and plan for costs.

Locally, Norfolk County Council provides support and advice on finding, choosing and paying for childcare in Norfolk. Find out more at www.norfolk.gov.uk/childcareadvice

10) The number of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) and specific data on Norfolk

In November 2025, the Government commissioned Alan Milburn to examine the rise in the number of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET). The full report, due later this year, will set out what a coherent participation system for early adulthood should look like, including responsibility, funding, accountability and how it reaches the young people the current system fails.

The [interim report](#), published on 28 May 2026, warns that the number of NEET young people aged 16 to 24 in the UK could rise to more than 16%, or 1.25 million, by the early 2030s. It challenges the view that young people do not want to work, noting that 84% of those surveyed said they wanted a job or training.

While not presenting solutions, the report says it is no longer credible to do nothing and assume economic growth alone will solve the problem. It argues that growth will not absorb young people who have never worked, whose health prevents participation, whose anxiety levels are higher, or whose career ladders have become harder to climb. It also says the UK has long paid the cost of youth inactivity rather than investing in prevention, and that there is no common mechanism to support young people's transition from school to work.

The report also warns that youth disengagement is becoming a strategic economic risk for Britain as an ageing population becomes increasingly reliant on the next generation.

Related data on Norfolk's economy and labour market is available on www.norfolkinsight.org.uk including measures of economic activity and worklessness. In Norfolk, 3.8% of 16 to 17 year olds are NEET, compared with 4% in England. As of April 2026, 17,565 people aged 16 and over in Norfolk were claiming out-of-work benefits, of whom 4.4% were aged 16 to 24.

11) Blue Badge Scheme

It takes an average of 12 weeks for the Council to process applications for a blue badge. A little reminder for residents about this scheme.

A blue badge is a pass that enables the holder to access a number of parking concessions for on-street parking. It allows the holder to park without charge or time limit in otherwise restricted on-street parking areas e.g. it allows them to park and yellow lines for up to three hours. Badge holders can also park in disabled parking spaces.

Who can apply for a blue badge? Blue badges are to help people with severe mobility problems to access goods and services by allowing them to park closer to their destination. In 2019, the government extended the eligibility of the scheme to include people with hidden and non-visible disabilities (for example anxiety disorders or a brain injury).

You can apply for a blue badge whether you travel as a driver or as a passenger.

The government has set out detailed guidance for local authorities on how to operate a blue badge scheme, including how to determine eligibility of applicants. The county council follows this guidance. More detailed information about eligibility is available at www.norfolk.gov.uk/bluebadge

12) Trading Standards update

Following inspections carried out as a result of intelligence received by Norfolk Trading Standards, over 5,700 illicit cigarettes, 24 illegal vapes and hand-rolling tobacco has been seized from businesses in Great Yarmouth.

The inspections were carried out with Norfolk Constabulary on 28 May as part of Norfolk Trading Standards ongoing work to tackle the sale of illegal tobacco products and protect the public.

This is a useful reminder of the role of Trading Standards, which helps ensure businesses trade fairly and legally, investigates scams and rogue traders, and works to keep consumers safe.

Further information about Trading Standards, including advice and support for businesses and consumers, is available on NCC website.

Residents are urged to report concerns about the illegal sale of vapes, cigarettes or tobacco to Citizens Advice on 0808 223 1133.

Anyone being coerced into preparing, distributing or selling illegal tobacco, can report it to HMRC online by searching 'report fraud HMRC' on GOV.UK or by contacting the HMRC Fraud hotline on 0800 788 887.

13) Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service – staying safe with lithium batteries

Recent incidents in Norfolk have highlighted the risks associated with lithium batteries.

This reflects a wider national increase in lithium battery fires, linked to the growing use of items such as e-bikes and e-scooters.

Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service is working with Norfolk Trading Standards to help prevent these incidents by promoting safety advice on buying batteries and devices safely, charging them correctly, using e-bikes and e-scooters safely, and disposing of lithium-ion batteries appropriately.

Guidance can be found at www.norfolk.gov.uk/lithiumbatteries

14) And finally! Since being elected here is a brief overview of what I've been up to:

- Spending time at County Hall on the County Councillor induction receiving presentations from the key areas and meeting Officers

- I have been appointed Chair of the Planning (Regulatory) Committee. I will also represent the County Council on the Eastern Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority.
- Liaising with village Speedwatch teams to understand where/how I can help with initiatives that the teams and/or Parish Councils are interested in
- Attended Heacham Parish Council & Snettisham Village Assembly meetings
- Visited Highways in King's Lynn for an introduction meeting and initial discussions on a number of topical matters around the villages that residents are raising with me
- I am meeting the Kings Lynn & West Norfolk Borough Council team on 8th June and look forward to learning about their strategic plan and service areas
- I will continue making my way to more Parish Council meetings and responding to emails from residents

Cllr Julie Costley
Docking Ward