

County Councillor Report from Cllr Julie Costley for Parish Councils of:
Docking, Sedgeford, Heacham, Snettisham, The Birchams, The Rudhams
July 2026

1. Local Government Re-organisation

NCC remains fully opposed to the Government's plan to replace Norfolk's eight councils with three unitary authorities and has formally initiated judicial review proceedings against the Secretary of State. In the meantime, the council is limiting reorganisation preparation work to the legal minimum, to protect frontline services and taxpayers' money. As my June report detailed, we do not believe the Government has made the case for change, and we are concerned about the cost and disruption to frontline services at a time when the council is already managing a forecast budget gap of over £34m and inherited debt of £900m.

South Norfolk Council has also pursued or signalled legal action, citing concerns over the process and the suitability of the three-unitary model. Similar challenges are being considered or pursued by councils in Suffolk and Essex.

The judicial review is at an early stage. The Court will first decide whether to grant permission for the case to proceed to a full hearing, where the lawfulness of the Government's decision-making (including consultation and criteria application) will be examined. Judicial reviews focus on process and legality rather than the policy merits of the decision itself.

As more information emerges - particularly regarding the court's decision on permission - I will provide further updates.

2. Confirmed Decision: NCC Local Member Highways Fund

NCC's Leader has taken a formal Cabinet Member Delegated Decision (24 June 2026) confirming the position on Local Member Highways Funds for 2026/27. The Highways Local Member Fund will not continue for new proposals this financial year. Instead, £0.924m is being reallocated to highways maintenance, to address the existing highways maintenance backlog and increase preventative maintenance work. The reallocated funds will be ring-fenced across four operational areas (North, South, West, City) and distributed proportionally based on the number of local councillors and used for larger, strategic maintenance works.

A summary of the Leader's rationale:

- Backlog and prevention are priority issues for all of Norfolk's residents and businesses, and this is a more efficient way of delivering highways spend than many small, separately commissioned local schemes.
- The Highways Local Member Fund has not always been fully utilised by Councillors. In 2025/26, £188,000 remained unallocated. By reallocating to highways maintenance, the teams can ensure full spend by financial year end is achieved.

Schemes already being developed and delivered from the 2025/26 allocation are unaffected and will still be delivered.

In practice this means I no longer hold a discrete Highways Fund pot to allocate to the parishes of the Docking ward directly, but the parish's priorities will still be considered through the wider highways maintenance provision. I am exploring other funding options that are currently available and I will update Parish Councils once I have the details. Link to the full decision report is here [Decision Details: 2026/27 budget adjustment – highways](#)

3. Confirmed Decision: Norfolk Community Fund

In the same announcement, the Leader confirmed that the Norfolk Community Fund (due to launch this month) will not proceed in 2026/27. Instead the £0.650m is being transferred to Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service, whose activity has increased by 73% over the last five years, including as a result of extreme weather events and lithium-ion battery fires, leaving the service unable to manage within its agreed budget. We recognise the value of community activity and the VCSE (voluntary, community and social enterprise) sector. To address this, NCC will shortly launch a £3.25m grant funding scheme for the VCSE sector, funded by the Crisis and Resilience Fund. I will share updates with Parish Councils once further detail is published. Link to full decision report: [Decision Details: 2026/27 Budget Adjustment – Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service and Norfolk Community Fund](#)

4. Electrical and Electronic Waste (WEEE) Recycling

Norfolk's recycling centres have, since earlier this year, been unable to accept fridges, freezers and small electrical items following a fire at the treatment facility previously used under contract. These waste streams are costly to process and treatment capacity is limited nationally, which has constrained the options available to the council. Following a national allocation process, NCC has appointed Recycling Lives as the new Producer Compliance Scheme contractor for WEEE collection and treatment. A service resumption date of 1 July 2026 has been targeted, and officers are pressing for this to be delivered as a priority. Residents are reminded of the importance of safe storage of electrical items and batteries, given the associated fire risk. Up to date guidance can be found on the NCC website here [Electrical waste recycling - Norfolk County Council](#)

5. Carers Week: support for unpaid carers in Norfolk

8th -14th June was Carers Week - an opportunity to raise awareness of the support available to unpaid carers across Norfolk. There are more than 95,000 unpaid carers in Norfolk looking after someone who could not manage without their support. Many people do not identify themselves as carers, but anyone who regularly helps a loved one in this way may be entitled to advice, information and practical support.

Support now includes Ask Cora, an AI assistant available through WhatsApp, which can help carers find information and support. To access the service, save 07457 404034 to a phone and send a WhatsApp message to begin asking questions.

Information and advice for carers is also available on the [Carers Matter Norfolk website](#). Carers Matter Norfolk is a countywide service funded by Norfolk County Council and the NHS to support unpaid carers. Services are free and available to people aged 18+ caring for someone aged 18+.

6. Apprenticeship Norfolk

Apprenticeships Norfolk organised an event at The Forum on 16th June. Apprenticeships Norfolk provide free advice and guidance for apprenticeship seekers and step-by-step support for employers looking to offer them. If you are looking for an apprenticeship or want to know more about opportunities in Norfolk, the link to the webpage is [here](#).

7. Redundancy Support Service launches new online portal

Norfolk County Council's Redundancy Support Service (RSS) has recently launched a new online portal to help residents and businesses access support where there is a risk of redundancy. It is running as a pilot until September 2027. The pilot was originally initiated to support an estimated 15,000 redundancies across the county stemming from major cutbacks at Lotus Cars and the local NHS. The team were recently mobilised at short notice to help staff affected by lay-offs at **Hughes Electrical**.

[The new portal](#) enables people to explore their options and contact the team for support at what can be a particularly stressful time. It also provides case studies. The RSS team is also keen to hear from partner organisations that may be able to help support Norfolk residents and businesses. They can be contacted at rss@norfolk.gov.uk

8. Drowning Prevention Week: Norfolk Water Safety Forum

Following recent water-related deaths across the country and in Norfolk, the Norfolk Water Safety Forum is encouraging communities to support Drowning Prevention.

The [Royal Life Saving Society campaign](#) helps children and young people learn how to stay safe around water. Norfolk Water Safety Forum partners, including Norfolk Fire & Rescue Service, Norfolk County Council, Norfolk Police, the Broads Authority, the RNLI and HM Coastguard are promoting a free lesson pack for schools and youth groups. Please use this [link to the resources on the Norfolk County Council website](#) for more information.

9. Potholes and road maintenance: new government reporting requirements

Highways Maintenance Transparency Reports were introduced by the Department for Transport (DfT) in 2025. DfT has [announced new rules](#) requiring councils to show how they are fixing potholes, future-proofing roads and investing in longer-term preventative maintenance.

The new requirements shift reporting from describing activity to proving outcomes and value for money, with compliance now linked to funding. Reports must set out planned and delivered works, how highways funding is being used, and action to reduce repeat repairs.

The new reports will be published in September 2026 and will inform eligibility for Government highways incentive funding and the next red, amber and green road maintenance ratings.

Norfolk was rated amber in 2025/26, alongside most local highway authorities. [Norfolk's highways maintenance transparency report 2025/26](#) highlights the scale of the county's network, including nearly 10,000km of roads, and its focus on preventative maintenance, early intervention and whole-life costing.

10. Big Norfolk Holiday Fun (Summer 2026) 20th July to 2nd September

Big Norfolk Holiday Fun, funded by the UK Government, provides free holiday activities and nutritious meals for eligible children and young people across Norfolk. The Summer 2026 programme is open to children aged 4–16 who receive benefits-related free school meals, including 4-year-olds in Reception.

Awarded Places are also available for particularly vulnerable children, including refugees, young carers, children in care, children excluded from school, socially isolated children, and victims of domestic abuse or exploitation.

What is available:

- Free, enriching holiday activities delivered by trusted local providers across Norfolk.
- A nutritious meal at every session.
- Inclusive provision, including support for children with additional needs.
- Online booking through the Eequ activity finder.

Activities include multisports, cycling, swimming, outdoor adventure, drama, dance, arts and crafts, and more. Families can check their eligibility by visiting the campaign webpage at www.norfolk.gov.uk/bignorfolkholidayfun

Professionals should refer vulnerable children for Awarded Places where appropriate.

Further information: bnhf@norfolk.gov.uk

11. Armed Forces Week 22-28 June

As lead partner of the Norfolk Armed Forces Covenant Board, NCC works with key agencies to champion the armed forces community, encourage organisations to support veterans and service leavers into employment, and help remove disadvantage for serving personnel, veterans and their families when accessing public services.

An Armed Forces Covenant is a voluntary statement of mutual support between a civilian community and the local armed forces community. The Covenant Board's three-year programme of work focuses on supporting Norfolk's 40,000 veterans.

To mark Armed Forces week the Council Chair, Cllr Julian Kirk, and the Armed Forces Commissioner for Norfolk, Andrew Taylor have issued a joint statement which is available [here](#).

There are also other events taking place across the county and nationally. [Visit the Armed Forces Day website](#) to see what's happening near you. Further information about the covenant and armed services support services are available on the county council's webpages [here](#).

12. Children's Services SEND support plan

Norfolk has published a three-year plan to improve support for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). The Norfolk Local SEND Reform Plan has been developed following extensive engagement with children and young people, families, schools, early years settings, colleges, the NHS and the voluntary sector.

The plan responds to a Government request for all areas to submit a Local SEND Reform Plan by 19 June. It focuses on support that can be introduced now, ahead of national legislation which

will bring further change and builds upon work already underway through the council's multi million pound Local First Inclusion programme to transform SEND education.

If approved by Government, the plan could see 90%, around £195m, of the council's historic Dedicated Schools Grant (SEND) deficit repaid. Further details are available in the press release [here](#). A link to the full plan is available [here](#).

13. And finally....what I've been up to during June:

I joined the Bircham and Docking **Speedwatch teams** for a session in the villages. Thank you for allowing me to join you, it was great to hear how it all works and your insights. I am grateful for our residents who give up their time to do this vital work that plays a huge part in keeping us safe on the roads.

Visited **West Area Highways** in King's Lynn to meet some of the team and learn about the work they do, their priorities, challenges and how we can work together for our communities.

I met some of the **Borough Council of KLWN team** who shared their strategic plan, financial performance and people plan along with useful information for us new Councillors. I look forward to working with them to deliver the best outcomes for our parishes and the whole of Norfolk.

I chaired the first meeting of the **Planning (Regulatory) Committee** on 19th June. The committee dealt with two planning applications: one seeking retrospective planning permission to regularise variations to the approved layout, plant, buildings, footway and lighting at an existing aggregate recycling facility in Thetford and an application to vary conditions to revise the restoration scheme to include an agricultural reservoir at Stanninghall Quarry, Horstead. After careful consideration the committee resolved to approve both applications. The minutes of the meeting will be on the NCC website in due course.

24th June I attended the AGM of the **Eastern Inshore Fisheries & Conservation Authority**. A new Chair (Cllr Timothy Adams, Norfolk CC) and Vice-Chair (Cllr Ray Whitaker, Lincolnshire CC) were voted in. The meeting dealt with a number of matters including appointing members to sub-committees; updates from the CEO and ACO; receiving reports on Health & Safety, Wash Cockle Fishery, Wash aquaculture management, Marine Protection and Science. There was a vote in favour of drafting a byelaw which will enable aquaculture management in The Wash. Full details of the meeting can be found on the Authority's website at www.eastern-ifca.gov.uk

I attended a meeting of the **Royal British Legion Councillor Network** to gain more detail around the support and network available across Norfolk for veterans and their families. I will be covering this in more detail in the near future.

I continue to attend Parish Council Meetings and work on a range of local issues raised by residents, including highways, speeding, environmental matters, safety concerns and access to local services. If you have an issue you would like me to look into, please do get in touch at Julie.Costley.Cllr@norfolk.gov.uk

Cllr Julie Costley
Docking Ward