



Latest update on events from your County Councillor Tom FitzPatrick

Fakenham Town Council

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Norfolk County Council updates

Devolution update

Following on from a discussion and recommendation at an special meeting of the County Council held on 16 October, Norfolk County Council's cabinet have voted in favour of proceeding with devolution.

Devolution will bring new powers and funding to boost jobs, transport, housing and growth in Norfolk and Suffolk. Under the Government's devolution priority programme, Norfolk and Suffolk have been offered:

- The transfer of powers and funding from Whitehall, to enable decisions on jobs, skills, transport and housing to be taken in Norfolk and Suffolk.
- A multi-million pound investment fund for 30 years, to spend on local priorities.

The new devolved powers and funding would be overseen by a mayor, elected by voters in May 2026, to lead a new combined authority.

You can find out more about devolution at www.norfolk.gov.uk/devolution.

Norfolk County Council Adoption Service

Norfolk is outperforming the national trend when it comes to recruiting adoptive parents. Whilst there has been a 12% drop in families considering adoption across

England this year, Norfolk County Council's Adoption Service has seen a significant rise. In 2024/25, 43 adoptive households were approved in Norfolk - a 53% increase on the previous year. These included 37 couples and six single adopters.

This positive news comes as the council celebrates National Adoption Week (20–26 October), which this year focuses on dispelling myths about who can adopt. Research shows that many prospective adopters worry they need a “perfect” home, but the reality is that children simply need a welcoming and loving environment. In fact, 41% of adoptive parents surveyed live in homes with two bedrooms or fewer, 65% do not have a garden, and 25% live in rented accommodation.

Norfolk Adoption Service is currently seeking families for 10 children. If you or someone you know is considering adoption, please visit [Norfolk Adoption Services online](#) or call 01603 638343 for a friendly chat and details of upcoming information events.

New Norfolk-wide highways contract

Norfolk County Council has appointed Kier as its new long-term contractor responsible for the maintenance and construction of the county's highway network.

Norfolk's highway network is one of the largest in the country, comprising around 6,000 miles of roads as well as extensive pedestrian and cycle paths. Kier will deliver a programme of highways maintenance and improvement, including road resurfacing and surface dressing, bridge works, drainage and the delivery of new transport infrastructure.

As part of the contract, Kier will invest in its existing site in Wymondham - upgrading facilities to reduce energy consumption and support the latest in sustainable construction and materials innovation, which will benefit the wider Norfolk economy.

A key feature of Kier's approach will be its commitment to local skills and employment. At any given time, Kier will employ at least 15 apprentices, providing structured training, professional qualifications, and career pathways for young people across Norfolk. The company will also run an annual 10-week programme for young people in care and care leavers, offering taster sessions, work experience, and employability skills, with support from supply chain partners.

National Updates

Post-16 Education and skills white paper

The Government has published a [Post-16 Education and Skills White Paper](#), setting out major reforms to simplify qualifications, boost skills, and align education with economic needs.

The reforms aim to improve outcomes for young people, support adult learners, and ensure that education and training provision meet the needs of local employers and communities.

Key proposals include:

- New “V-Levels” to replace most vocational Level 3 qualifications, offering flexible options alongside A-levels and T-levels.
- Reformed Level 2 pathways from 2027, with clearer routes into further study or employment.
- Support for GCSE resits, including new stepping-stone qualifications in English and maths.
- Lifelong Learning Entitlement for adults, enabling modular study and access to fee loans for up to four years.
- Growth & Skills Levy to help employers fund short courses and apprenticeships in priority sectors.
- Expansion of Technical Excellence Colleges, including in clean energy, digital and advanced manufacturing.
- £800m investment in 16–19 education, alongside a national CPD programme for FE staff.
- Stronger local governance, with Strategic Authorities playing a key role in shaping regional skills plans.

Clean Energy Jobs Plan

The Government has [published](#) a national plan to recruit and train the ‘next generation’ of clean energy workers, aiming to double employment in the sector to 860,000 by 2030.

For young people these jobs can offer higher levels of pay, with entry level roles in the majority of key occupations paying 23% more than the same occupations in other sectors.

According to government figures, jobs in wind, nuclear, and electricity networks all advertise average salaries of over £50,000, compared to the UK average of £37,000, and are spread across coastal and post-industrial communities.

Mandatory reading test for year 8 pupils

The Education Secretary has confirmed that all pupils will sit a mandatory reading test at age 13 (in year 8) in a bid to drive up reading standards. This new measure aims to set clear expectations to support parents, teachers and pupils, identifying

gaps early and targeting help for those who need it, while enabling the most able to go further.

The Government is also expanding its support in reception year through the English Hubs programme, which will focus on the children who struggle the most, alongside reforms to boost the quality of early years education, and wider family support through Best Start Family Hubs.

Schools White Paper delay

The Education Secretary has [written to the Education Select Committee](#) following their report on the special educational needs and disability (SEND) system. Her letter includes information about the Schools White Paper (that was due in the coming weeks), saying it will not be published until “early in the new year”.

Financial penalties for environmental offences – new consultation

Water companies who commit environmental offences could face quicker penalties of up to £500,000, under changes being considered by the government.

A [consultation has been launched](#) to expand and strengthen the current range of financial penalties available to the Environment Agency in a bid to clamp down on more offences.

The consultation closes on 3 December 2025.

Tom FitzPatrick

Chairman of Norfolk County Council

County Councillor for the Fakenham Division

(Dunton, Fakenham, Helhoughton, Hempton with Pudding Norton and Testerton, Raynham & Tattersett)