

County Councillor's Report January 2023

Happy New Year! Apologies to those councils meeting in the first week of January: I am away on holiday until 6th Jan so will miss your meeting. Here's my latest written report.

Funding for the County Council

The government has announced what funding will be coming to Norfolk County Council to help pay for local services. It's not easy to make a statement about Local Government Finance interesting or even understandable to most of us but I will do my best.

The EDP (and Councillor Jamieson) do a decent job of [explaining the settlement here](#).

If the County Council increases Council Tax by 5% (the maximum it is allowed to without calling a referendum), it will have £81 million more to spend next year, an increase of 10.5%.

The government is consulting on the Settlement and if you are interested in having your say, you can find the [details of the consultation here](#). You have until 16 January to respond. Scroll down to Appendix B in the link to find the specific questions they are asking but, also, don't be put off by the format and the jargon - have your say in general terms if you want to.

For Norfolk residents, the key thing (apart from the likely increase of 5% in Council Tax) is that cuts in spending that the County Council had planned to make will still go ahead. The briefing says that the extra money from the government will not quite cover the additional costs that the Council faces from inflation and increases in staff wages.

More than two fifths of the savings will need to come from the Adult Social Care budget, reducing its annual budget by close to £50 million by 2027. After years of cutting hard at the Children's Services budget, that department is still expected to cut more than £27 million from its annual budget by 2027. Community and Environmental Services (which includes Highways) will need to cut its spending by £28 million a year by 2027. You can see the details of the Council's [Medium Term Financial Plan here](#) (from page 27 onwards).

A County Deal for Norfolk: what we know

A 'Devolution Deal' for Norfolk was [announced early in December](#) which will change the way the County Council is run and give some extra money and power to the county.

It will not change the structure of Local Government in Norfolk (so Parish Councils and District Councils will still exist and continue to do the things they do now). But it will mean we get to elect the leader of the County Council (who might be called a Mayor) directly ourselves.

The next step is that the deal will be taken to full Council and Cabinet for consideration in January 2023. These extraordinary meetings have been arranged as follows:

- Extraordinary Full Council, 10am on 17 January 2023
- Extraordinary Cabinet, 2pm on 17 January 2023

The decision to *progress further* with the deal is an executive decision not a decision for full Council to make. That means that the Cabinet of senior councillors (in Norfolk's case they are all Conservative because they have the majority of councillors) makes the decision. The current leader of the council has, though, committed to bring the text of the deal to the full Council for discussion.

The final decision on whether to *change the governance model* of the Council to enable a directly elected Leader will be a decision for full Council to make following public consultation and this will be taken to the Council meeting to be held on 12th December 2023.

The election for a Leader will take place in May 2024. The next full County Council elections are due in May 2025 so the Leader's first term in office will run for five years. From 2029 onwards the Leader elections and elections for the County Council will happen at the same time and both will be elected for four years.

I asked whether the new model will mean the end of the Police and Crime Commissioner and the Local Enterprise Partnership. Under the deal the PCC will still exist unfortunately which is a real missed opportunity. Hopefully that can be corrected in due course. The County Council will take on the work of the LEP though (economic development) so at least that comes back under the control of people who are elected in Norfolk.

An additional County Council meeting has been called for 17th January to debate the Deal. If you want to share your views with me ahead of that meeting (as individuals, I realise you won't be able to do it in time formally as Parish Councils) please do get in touch.

New Recycling Centre at North Walsham

I was asked about progress on this and so I checked with County Hall. This is the reply I received:

The first searches found no suitable sites on the market in the North Walsham area, so we are now approaching landowners directly to see what sites could be available for this type of development based on searches of vacant plots in suitable areas.

And the skill really is in finding the right site in terms of location, size, neighbours and access. As a compromise on any of those aspects can really damage the prospects of securing planning permission.

And if you have local insights or pointers that you think would prove useful please let me know, and when we have more clarity we will let you know too.

Joel Hull, Assistant Director – Waste and Water Management

Future of the Mobile Library Service

I also asked for an update on plans for the Mobile Library Service which is threatened with funding cuts. This is the reply I received:

There were 1397 responses to the consultation, that had to be extended due to the national period of mourning. They are being fully considered in the development of proposals that will go to Cabinet for decision in January.

Jill Terrell, Head of Libraries and Information Service

School energy costs

I asked the schools in the area I represent about increased energy costs and they confirmed that they expect them to almost double this year. The government is providing some help but at the last meeting of the County Council I asked what help we are giving to schools. I am promised a full reply in writing which I will share when I get it.

Ed Maxfield. Contact details and more news about my work at www.edmaxfield.org.uk