

County Councillor's report December 2022

The Budget

For Local Government the government's (latest) Budget wasn't quite the blizzard of cuts that many were expecting. This is Norfolk County Council's official assessment:

Local government already faces wage, fuel and other price pressures in delivering services. The Statement promises increases in spending across health, education and social care as well as continuing big ticket infrastructure projects.

It was acknowledged that social care is critical, particularly in its role in reducing pressures on the NHS. Although £1bn in new funding to support social care for 2023-24 has been promised, more than half of the funding to support social care packages will come from 'further flexibility for local authorities on council tax and from delaying the rollout of adult social care charging reform to October 2025.

The Autumn Statement promised an acceleration of infrastructure investment across the board to support both growth and energy efficiency with an emphasis on road, rail, broadband and 5G – with no cuts to capital budgets in the next two years and maintaining funding for three years in cash terms.

Further flexibility on Council Tax means NCC can increase the charge by up to 5% next year (instead of 3%). Even though they didn't raise Council Tax by the full amount last year I expect them to do so this time. So expect higher Council Tax bills next year! I should be able to give more information about the County Council's plans in my February report.

An elected Mayor for Norfolk?

The Chancellor caught the County Council leadership on the hop by announcing that a deal had been done to create an elected Mayor or Leader for Norfolk as part of a 'County Deal.' The leadership of NCC has been open that it wants to do a deal that will bring more power and funding to the county but has resisted a directly elected leader. I have a briefing in the first week of December where I expect things will become a bit clearer. I'll report back!

Schools Funding

The Budget announced increased funding for schools, but schools are facing increasing costs too. I have asked the County Council what extra help it can give to schools facing huge increases in energy bills.

SEND re-inspection

Norfolk's support for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities will be under the spotlight at the end of November. Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission will revisit the County to follow up on their inspection of a couple of years ago. That first inspection identified a number of areas where the County Council was performing poorly and the revisit will focus on checking progress to fix those issues.

Fire and Rescue Service

Norfolk's Fire and Rescue Service has published its new draft 'Community Risk Management Plan', a dull name for how the Fire Service plans to work in the future to cut the risk of fire in the county. You can read more about it online:

<https://www.norfolk.gov.uk/safety/norfolk-fire-and-rescue-service/about-nfrs/publications/integrated-risk-management-plan>

If you click on the 'Have Your Say' link you can contribute to the consultation and see a list of the in-person events that are taking place.

Flooding

A report about flooding in Norfolk came to the Scrutiny Committee in November (I am a member of the committee.) The report said that Norfolk is the 10th most at risk out of 149 local authority areas for flooding. More than 350 properties in 120 settlements were affected in 2020 and the report says more than 30,000 properties are potentially at risk.

It was an interesting and useful discussion but it is quite a complicated area (the chair of the committee pointed out that up to 36 different organisations could have a role in fixing a flooding issue). I have asked some follow-up questions. When I get the answers I will put together a separate briefing on the topic and circulate it.

Finally, if I don't see you before then, I hope you have a great Christmas and a Happy New Year!

Ed Maxfield

www.edmaxfield.org.uk for updates, links and full contact details