

County Councillor's report November 2023

Schools Funding

A c*** up in the Department for Education means schools in Norfolk will be getting £5.6 million less next year than has been planned for.

Each year the Department for Education announces schools funding allocations for Local Authority areas in the summer. Most of the money is allocated to schools based on a national formula but part is allocated locally based on priorities agreed with the education sector. The County Council is in the middle of its normal consultation process now.

In October, the DfE issued new (lower) figures after it spotted an error in its own calculations. The DfE has apologised for the error which affects all local authority areas. This error affects the schools block funding only and does not affect the High Needs Block which funds support for children with additional needs.

Schools have not received any removal of current funding, but school budgets are already tight and many will have begun to plan for next year based on the original July figures and will now need to adjust what they plan to spend on staffing and activities.

The County Council has written to the DfE demanding that they stick to the original allocation.

Support for households this winter

The County Council is receiving £13.4m from central government to keep the Household Support Fund running until the end of March 2024. The council is adding an additional £400,000 to make the total programme of support worth £13.8m. It is working with District Councils and charities to decide the best way to support people in need of help.

As part of the Household Support Fund, all 47 of Norfolk's libraries will be offering free winter support items until the end of March 2024 (while stocks last). Including hot water bottles, toiletries and Tricky Period bags:

There are details of the help available from the Household Support Fund at:

<http://norfolk.gov.uk/costofliving>

More cuts planned to council spending

The County Council needs to slice another £46 million off its spending next year. It was interesting, and alarming, to see the Conservative councillor in charge of finances announce in the press that without extra help from the government the council could end up like Birmingham and Northamptonshire and effectively have to declare itself bankrupt. I hope that was a bit of politics done in the week of the Conservative Party conference because if not, services for people in Norfolk will be hit hard.

Pressures facing the council include:

- Price inflation (including wages) of £12.5 million, including £7 million in adult social care and £3.2 million in children's services
- Demographic pressures (increasing demand), including £5.5 million in adult social care and £9.5 million in children's services

So far, £26.5 million of savings have been proposed and the remainder will be developed over the next few months:

- Adult social services, £14.2 million
- Children's services, £4.8 million
- Community and environmental services, £5.5 million
- Strategy, transformation and finance £1.9 million

There will be a public consultation on the budget over the autumn. The current proposals include a Council Tax increase of 4.99 per cent, including the adult social care precept of two per cent.

As always, we wait to hear whether more funding will be provided in the autumn statement in November, or the provisional local government funding settlement in December.

The council makes a final decision on the budget in February.

Flooding and blocked roads

A topsy turvy year of weather has seen the wind and rain of autumn arrive with a blast in the last couple of weeks. There seem to have been a few challenges keeping roads clear both from fallen trees and from localised flooding. I know Parish Clerks are well used to reporting problems and know the people to chase too but anyone can report issues that they find. More information here:

www.norfolk.gov.uk/flooding

[Report a problem - Norfolk County Council](#)

I can help with chasing up responses too of course. I am also always very keen to hear how well the County Council responds to reports. I know it is frustrating how hard it can be to get the County Council to listen when changes need to be made but we will only be able to get things done if we make sure the council hears the complaints.

Fatal road accident at Swafield

The head of Highways at County Hall has suggested there might be money available to make road safety improvements in Swafield following the tragic accident there recently. It's not clear how much money they will spend or what measures they are prepared to take but I am meeting with Duncan Baker MP, the head of Highways and representatives of the Parish Council soon to discuss it. This is an issue that affects more than just Swafield because of the ever-increasing volume of traffic using the road to reach the coast. I've been talking about the need for a joined-up solution for Trunch, Swafield, Knapton, Mundesley and Gimmingham for a long time. Small progress has already been made thanks to the hard work of Parish Councils but more still needs to be done.

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