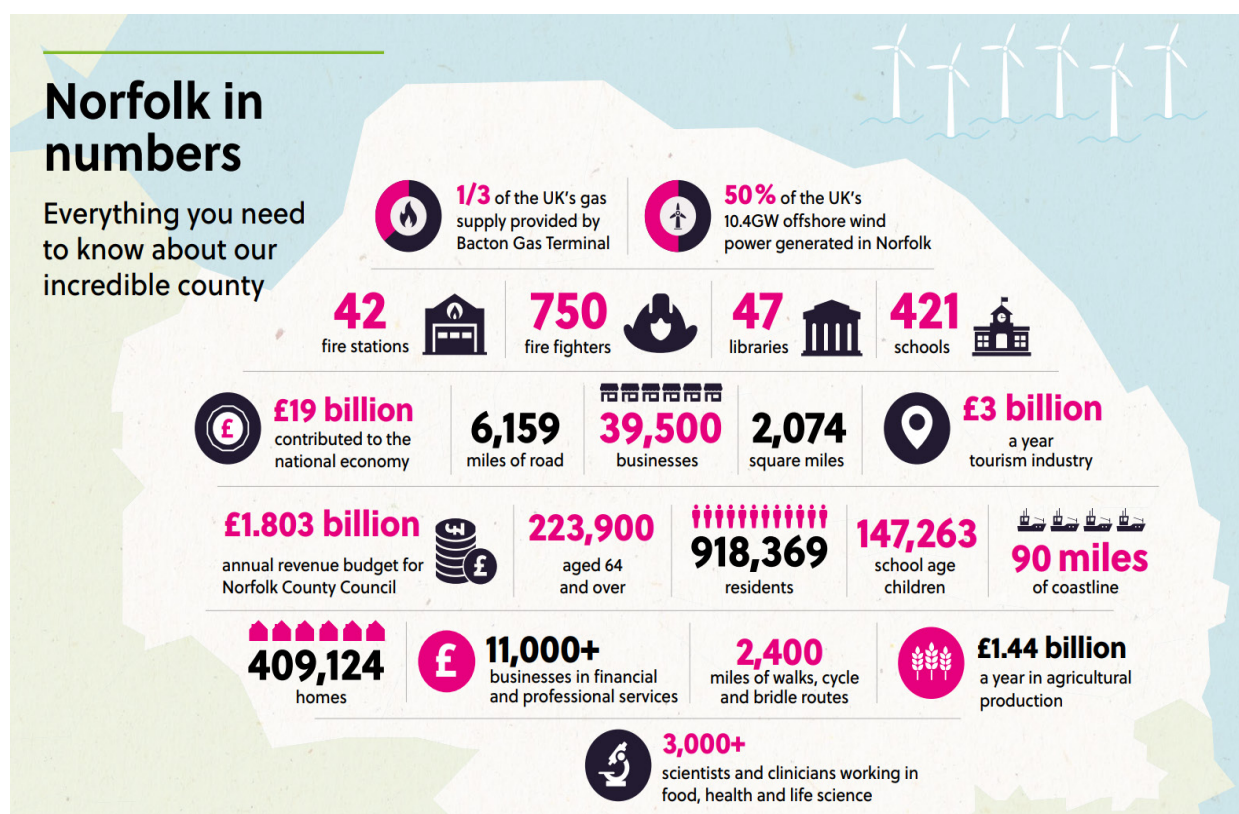


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- 97.4% of highways inspections completed within timescale
- 96.8% of 'Priority A' defects (classified as dangerous/emergency) were fixed within the Transport Asset Management Plan timescales
- 95% Customer satisfaction (with Council Services)
- 96% of Looked after Children with an up-to-date Personal Education Plan
- Completed over 90,000 Adult Social Care Assessments for over 26,000 people



Council agrees £528m budget

Councillors have backed a budget that "delivers for Norfolk", in the face of major challenges facing local government.

Deputy council leader Councillor Andrew Jamieson, cabinet member for finance, told today's full council meeting that the budget would deliver for Norfolk. This is despite major cost and demand pressures facing all councils.

He said: "Our priorities are stable and sustainable finances, well delivered public services, economic growth and protecting and enhancing Norfolk's heritage and environment."

Cllr Jamieson said it was a budget for the future, with an additional £60m for adult social services and £35m extra for children's services, and savings from transforming how the council operates.

Cllr Jamieson pledged to continue to lobby the next Government for multi-year settlements, fair funding and reform of adult social care funding.

County Council leader, Councillor Kay Mason Billig, said the council would continue to be ambitious for Norfolk and had achieved many successes - against a tough economic backdrop.

She said: "We know that our residents will be concerned about the decisions we make and how that may affect them. This year's budget has been one of the toughest to determine but we have a statutory duty to provide a balanced position, and that is what we are presenting to you."

The key headlines from the budget agreed today are:

- £122m of investment to meet demand and cost pressures next year - including £34.6m for inflation, £38m for legislative requirements, £39.7m for demand and demographic issues and £9.6m for policy decisions.
- £41.5m of new savings, including £9.6m from transforming how the council operates.
- A proposed 4.99% increase in the County Council's share of Council Tax, in line with the Government's capping level (2.99% for general Council Tax and 2% for adult social care). This would increase the Council's share of band D bills to £1,672.11. A 4.99% rise would generate £24.9m.
- A small number of the budget proposals have been identified as requiring consultation, as they may relate to a policy or service change. Cabinet will take decisions on these proposals in the summer, after considering the consultation results.

Councillors accept £600 million devolution deal

County councillors have voted to accept a county deal devolution agreement with the Government, to transfer significant funding and powers to Norfolk.

Government funding will start transferring to Norfolk next summer, if councillors vote in July 2024 to stage the first election for a leader in May 2025. The deal will mean that decisions can be taken in Norfolk, for Norfolk.

The full council agreed the following recommendations:

Council:

- Recognises the work carried out during 2023 to consult with the public, inform Members and prepare plans in relation to the 'in-principle' County Deal brought to Council in January this year
- Commends the work undertaken by the Leader and Officers to secure additional benefits for the Norfolk County Deal and resolves that the Deal should be accepted
- Agrees that the election for the Directly Elected Leader should be held alongside the county council elections in May 2025 to enable the widest possible engagement with the electorate
- Agrees that the resolution adopting the new governance arrangements should be brought to the Full Council meeting on 23 July 2024 to facilitate that election date

For further details go to www.norfolk.gov.uk/norfolkcountydeal.

Background – what would a county deal mean?

Norfolk faces a major opportunity to gain new powers and funding from the Government, through an agreement called the County Deal.

We could make more decisions in Norfolk, for Norfolk and secure investment of more than £600m over 30 years. If councillors agree the in-principle deal, it will enable us to invest in areas such as transport, skills and job opportunities, housing and regeneration, tailored to the needs of local people.

A County Deal would mean:

- Having a Council Leader who is directly elected by the public, enabling Norfolk's voice to be heard by the Government
- Targeting funding and resources to Norfolk's own priorities
- Unlocking housing and employment sites

- Investing in the skills we need and attracting and retaining key businesses
- Opening the door to more – further powers and funding in future

Norfolk County Council provided extra support to households this winter

Earlier this year, Norfolk County Council announced it would receive further funding from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to run the Household Support Fund until 31 March 2024. The Chancellor of the Exchequer announced in the Budget that this funding would be extended by a further six months.

The council has received £13.4m from central government and adding an additional £400,000 to make the total programme of support worth £13.8m. It is working closely with district, borough, and city councils, VCSE and public sector partners to identify and implement a range of support measures to meet the needs of vulnerable households.

Norfolk's roads and footpaths to be fixed as part of £4.51m funding

Thirty-four roads and 20 footpaths across the County will be repaired by Norfolk County Council during this coming year as part of Government funding.

Roads from Great Yarmouth to King's Lynn, from Hunstanton to Thetford and many in between the entire County will receive reclamite spray or resurfacing along with footpath construction to ensure Norfolk's infrastructure can best help people to get to work, travel to services and access Norfolk's natural and cultural assets through effective highways maintenance.

Twenty-seven brand new gritters joined Norfolk's fleet

Twenty-seven brand new gritters took taking to the roads for the first time later this winter in a £3,238,000 boost to the annual push to help keep Norfolk moving safely during the winter months.

The news came as crews completed their first gritting runs of the season at the weekend, treating routes in the west, inland north and south and east coast areas of the county.

Norfolk's fleet of 58 winter vehicles treat 2,200 miles of roads on each full 3-hour gritting run. All A and B-class roads and some C-class roads are treated with a focus on commuter and major bus routes and as far as is possible one route into all villages. The A11 and A47 are gritted by National Highways.

In addition to the 49 gritting routes, a number of pedestrian areas and main pavements are treated in the centre of Norwich, Great Yarmouth and King's Lynn, and more than 2000 grit bins are available around the county for people to use on roads, pavements and cycle paths.

Find more information via www.norfolk.gov.uk/winter

Norfolk flood protection took centre stage in Westminster

The threat posed by flooding and coastal erosion in Norfolk has been laid out starkly for MPs as Norfolk County Council has taken their case for change to the heart of Westminster.

The delegation from Norfolk, led by Norfolk County Council Leader Cllr Kay Mason Billig and the Chair of the Norfolk Strategic Flood Alliance (NSFA), Henry Cator, met with MPs, on the 71st anniversary of the 1953 North Sea Flood, to explain the risks Norfolk faces and how those risks could be addressed.

As demonstrated over this winter, our county faces regular risks of flooding, with Norfolk ranked tenth most at risk of surface water flooding out of 149 local authority areas. In addition, the county's position on the North Sea exposes it to tidal threats as well as significant coastal erosion: without action, it's estimated that in North Norfolk alone approximately 1,030 residential and commercial properties could be lost to erosion by 2100. That number could be up to 10,000 in all of Norfolk.

These risks threaten both Norfolk residents and the contribution Norfolk makes to the wider country, as home to 54% of the offshore wind generation capacity in the UK and a major producer of food.

In a presentation delivered in Portcullis House, part of the Parliamentary Estate in Westminster, Norfolk's delegation made the case for MPs to:

- Push for legislative permission to build reservoirs designed to capture excess water in times of flood, for use in times of drought
- Advocate for Property Flood Protection measures to be granted directly to the Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA) for faster allocation for those who need it

- Reduce bureaucracy by granting greater autonomy in funding allocation for surface water flood mitigation schemes
- Combine enforcement and maintenance powers and responsibilities for LLFA's
- Support the creation of a dedicated Minister for the Coast

Challenges of coastal erosion and flooding discussed by councillors

Norfolk councillors are being invited to renew their call for a dedicated Minister for the Coast, as well as funding from central government for flood defences for Norfolk.

Norfolk County Council's Infrastructure and Development Select Committee considered a report on Coastal Erosion and Flooding in the county at their meeting in February, forming an update to the previous examination of the issue by the council's Scrutiny Committee in November last year.

The report recommends that councillors support the lobbying of central government for more funding for coastal erosion schemes, as well as support the appointment of a Minister for the Coast to give coastal communities a champion sitting within government who can take a holistic view of the challenges and opportunities that such communities face, especially coastal erosion and flooding.

Securing a commitment to such an appointment would give confidence that coastal issues are recognised at the heart of government and that solutions to the threats these communities face will be addressed.

The report spells out the challenge posted by coastal erosion along Norfolk's 90 miles of coastline, including the predictions of possible sea level rises of up to 1.15m by the end of the century. To compound the challenge, Norfolk has part of the fastest eroding coastline in North-West Europe.

Without action, it's estimated that in North Norfolk alone approximately 1,030 residential and commercial properties could be lost to erosion by 2105.

The Infrastructure and Development Select Committee meeting was held just over three weeks after the Leader of Norfolk County Council, Cllr Kay Mason Billig, visited Westminster to lay out the need for a new Minister for the Coast to MPs.

£1 million boost for Highway Parish Partnership Schemes

Schemes totalling over £1m will be distributed across Norfolk to deliver the wants and needs of local parishes and residents as part of the Highway Parish Partnership.

The Parish Partnership scheme began in September 2011, when Parish and Town Councils were invited to submit bids for local highway improvements, with the County Council funding up to 50% of bid costs. The key benefits of the scheme are that it:

- Delivers local priorities identified by local people.
- Draws in additional funding for small scale highway improvements, enabling us to collectively deliver more schemes.
- Gives local communities an opportunity to directly influence the improvements in their local area. The programme continues to be well received by Parish/Town Councils, Local Members, and communities. Information about the number of bids received through the scheme over the past twelve years demonstrates there is a good spread across Norfolk.

A County Council contribution £467,884 and a Safety Camera Partnership contribution of £43,760 along with funding from Town and Parish Councils, will enable a programme of local works totalling £1,040,586 to be delivered.

For information on current schemes and if there are Parish Councils who wish to apply for future schemes then contact your County Councillor in the first instance. For further information please see <https://www.norfolk.gov.uk/parishpartnerships>

More people 'choose the bus' in Norfolk after first year of bus service improvement plan

It's been just over a year since Norfolk County Council received £49.55m of funding from the Department for Transport (DfT) to improve bus services across the county. There have been huge numbers of improvements already made across the county, and the latest figures show that passenger numbers have increased throughout the year with the number of fare-paying passengers now exceeding pre-covid levels.

Passenger numbers across the UK fell dramatically during the covid-19 pandemic with an average drop across the UK of 50.3% but in many areas even more.

Latest figures for Norfolk show that overall bus passenger numbers have increased by 18% in the last year with the number of fare-paying passengers now at 107% compared to pre-pandemic baseline figures. Norfolk is bucking the trend as nationally bus usage figures are at between 89% to 98% of pre-pandemic levels*.

Concessionary pass holders, who have been the slowest to return to using the bus since the pandemic, are now at 83% of pre-pandemic levels and have increased by more than 12% since January this year.

Norfolk received the sixth highest allocation in the country and the funding consists of £30.9m of capital funding and £18.6m of revenue funding.

Approximately £12 million of the funding was allocated to providing new or expanded bus routes and increased service frequencies on key routes, including more evening and weekend services and this has been very much the focus of the spend in this first year of funding.

- A total of 31 enhancements have been made to services this year bringing more regular bus services to 93 parishes with a population of more than 306,000 people.
- There are now more evening services on key routes across 21 parishes in the county including to Dereham, Watton, Thorpe St Andrew and Horsford.
- 49 parishes have an improved Saturday service while 5 parishes are benefitting from improved Sunday services.

In addition to the service enhancements year one of delivering the bus service improvement plan for the county has also seen the following infrastructure improvements.

- The first Travel Norfolk Travel Hub opened in North Walsham providing improved waiting areas with real-time information and integration with walking and cycling facilities.
- A county-wide review of bus stops has started with stops in Hunstanton and Swaffham and Hellesdon being upgraded to our new gold standard.
- 84 accessible bus stop boarding points have been delivered countywide.

Bus travel has also become cheaper this year and offers great value for money thanks not only to the Government fare cap which most operators in Norfolk have signed up to but also 4 local fares offers delivered thanks to the bus service improvement plan:

- £1.50 flat fares for King's Lynn
- £1.50 flat fares for Thetford
- 25% off group, weekly and monthly tickets
- Reduced park & ride fares

*taken from DfT Usage of transport by mode report

More evening bus services out of Norwich thanks to bus service improvement plan

A number of bus services operated by First Eastern Counties have been running more often from thanks to money that Norfolk County Council secured from the Department for Transport (DfT) to improve bus services across the County.

The changes to timetables which started on Sunday 29th October are:

- More evening journeys between the City Centre and Hethersett via Norfolk and Norwich Hospital on the Pink Line 11/11a/12. Hourly journeys will operate every day and these replace existing 13A and 13B journeys to and from the hospital.
- New evening and Sunday journeys on the Green Line to Wymondham and some routes have been extended to Silfield and Harts Farm.
- Sunday and evening journeys on Service 13 shortening journey times between Norwich, Wymondham and Attleborough.
- Green Line services have been renumbered, to make it easier to identify your destination when travelling to the east of the city.
- Services 14 and 14A will operate to and from Dussindale.
- Services 15 and 15A will operate to and from Blofield Heath.
- Services 16 and 16A will operate to and from Lingwood.
- The Purple Line 36/37/38/39 is getting later evening services and improved Sunday services – as well as an extension to the Horsford services to operate to Memorial Road and Flagcutters Way on the Kingfisher Meadow development.
- Thorpe St Andrew will get a new hourly evening service as well as new Sunday journeys on the Red Line 23/24. Previously no evening service the last bus will now depart the city centre for Thorpe St Andrew at 23:08.
- Spixworth will be getting a new hourly service on a Sunday on the Turquoise Line 13 (previously just five journeys on a Sunday).

24/7 free travel to all disabled bus pass holders in Norfolk

From 1 February 2024 all Norfolk residents who hold a disabled concessionary travel pass will be eligible for free bus travel 24 hours a day, seven days a week when travelling within the county.

The decision, which was published today by Norfolk County Council, means that more than 14,500 people across the county who hold a concessionary bus pass due to disability, and their eligible companions, will now be able to travel on any bus at any time free of charge across Norfolk.

Previously concessionary pass holders with a disability were only able to travel for free on buses off-peak (all day on Saturdays and Sundays but only from 09:30 Monday to Friday) except for those registered blind or visually impaired.

Offering free travel at all times is over and above the minimum requirement set by government, and is something that a local authority can choose to do but doesn't have to do. The change was recommended following an updated equality impact assessment of the scheme which concluded that it is now unfair to offer a discretionary enhancement to just one group of disabled people (i.e. those who are blind or visually impaired).

The recommendation agreed by the individual cabinet member was to 'extend the concessionary travel discretion of free travel at all times to all eligible disabled passholders and eligible companions, from 1 February 2024.'

The cost of providing this enhancement is estimated at £50,000 which will be funded by the Council's ring-fenced public transport budget provided by the Department for Transport.

Householders can have free DIY waste disposal for small projects

Norfolk residents have been able to dispose of small amounts of DIY waste at Norfolk's Recycling Centres free of charge from 31st December following changes made by Norfolk County Council.

The change applies to small-scale projects carried out by householders on their own home, allowing them to bring a maximum 100 litres (must fit into 2 x 50l bags) for free or one single item (maximum size of 200cm x 70cm x 75cm). Each household is allowed four free visits with DIY waste every four weeks. Anything beyond this will still be charged at normal rates.

The change in policy follows Government abolishing charges for the disposal of limited amounts and types of DIY waste at recycling centres across the UK.

Prior to 31st December, customers with DIY-type construction and demolition waste will continue to be directed to the 'Pay as you throw service' which is available at all centres.

Traders must continue to pay for DIY waste. For more information visit www.norfolk.gov.uk/DIYwaste

Climate Strategy was launched at Gressenhall Farm and Workhouse Museum

Norfolk County Council's Climate Strategy, adopted by Cabinet last May, was launched at Gressenhall Farm and Workhouse Museum with special guest Kate Strong, world record holder and endurance cyclist.

The Climate Strategy sets out how the council will work not only to reduce its own carbon emissions, but to drive down emissions across the county, protect the unique environment of Norfolk, and to seize the opportunities the move to a green economy represents, securing investment and growth for Norfolk.

Key proposals include:

- Supporting active and sustainable transport, including further bus improvements and electric vehicle charging
- Providing space for nature and developing a nature recovery strategy
- Retrofitting council buildings to take out gas and oil heating and improve insulation – and encouraging businesses, residents and other organisations to do the same
- Reducing emissions from the council's companies, such as Norse
- Developing the green economy, with support for green skills, sustainable tourism and businesses
- The development of a nature recovery strategy to protect our natural assets and encourage greater biodiversity
- Working with the Tyndall Centre for climate change research at the University of East Anglia, to understand climate change impacts and how Norfolk might adapt to them
- Close collaboration between public sector, business, community and voluntary groups

Norfolk and Suffolk councils given authority and funding to help nature's recovery

Norfolk County Council and Suffolk County Council have been formally appointed by Government as responsible authorities for preparing a Local Nature Recovery Strategy for their respective counties.

This means that they will be working together to help improve wildlife habitats and reverse the decline of biodiversity across the region, working with local communities to develop a tailored nature recovery strategy for their areas.

They will also work with other local planning authorities, the Broads Authority, Natural England, and a wide range of stakeholders and partners, including farming and landowner groups.

This is all part of Government's ambition to further drive nature recovery, with 48 individual local authorities across the country receiving allocations from a £14 million funding pot. Norfolk and Suffolk County Councils will receive £333,000 and £282,000 respectively over two years to fund this work. With the best ways to support nature recovery depending on local character and geography, Local Nature Recovery Strategies will help communities map out the action needed in their area to restore nature.

Norfolk County Council environmental credentials praised in review

Norfolk County Council is doing better than almost every other county council in the country at moving towards net zero, according to an independent assessment.

Campaign group Climate Emergency UK produced scorecards marking action by councils on climate change, including areas such as buildings, transport, planning and biodiversity.

Norfolk was placed joint second with Devon among county councils, with only Oxfordshire ranked higher, after a nine-month assessment process.

Councils were marked according to responses to questions around issues such as retrofitting properties, whether they used electric vehicles, whether they have climate action plans and how high recycling rates are.

Ready to Act new Public Health plan to improve health and wellbeing in Norfolk

Norfolk's new Public Health Strategic Plan prioritises prevention and identifies where Public Health and partners need to focus to improve health and wellbeing in the county.

The plan, being presented to Norfolk County Council's Cabinet, identified opportunities for organisations and communities across the county to promote good health and support people's wellbeing.

These include promoting stop smoking initiatives and encouraging people to take up their free NHS health checks.

The strategic plan, called Ready to Change, Ready to Act details how the Council will work with key partners to help the people of Norfolk to make positive changes to their physical and mental health. It includes work to address the longer-term impacts of the pandemic, such as mental wellbeing, supporting healthy weight and promoting engagement with public health services.

Find out how you could get help from the Household Support Fund at www.norfolk.gov.uk/costofliving

Launch of Working Well Norfolk employment programme

Working Well Norfolk, a £2.7M scheme funded by the Department for Work & Pensions set to help Norfolk residents with long-term health conditions or physical impairments get into work and to stay in work, was officially launched by Cllr Fabian Eagle at the Work, Skills and Wellbeing Fair.

The scheme, managed by Norfolk County Council and run by delivery partners Seetec Pluss and Standguide Ltd aims to provide free personalised 1:1 support to 1,100 people who have physical disabilities or who are experiencing mild to moderate mental health difficulties, and to people who are experiencing other long-term sickness or disabilities that impact their daily activities. Participants can be unemployed or currently in work. Interested individuals or businesses should contact Seetec Pluss on 07933 818 986 or see www.seetecpluss/working-well-norfolk to register their interest.

Annual awards recognise dozens of outstanding contributions to Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service

Achievements including saving a village from the clutches of wildfire, helping transport a horse mannequin called Brandy, and restoring a fire station flower garden, all received recognition at the Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service Annual Staff Awards.

The ceremony recognised the efforts of fire fighters, fire staff, their friends and families and community partners and volunteers, showing how everyone has a unique part to play in to make in making the service great.

A total of 16 awards were given in nine categories: Cadet of the Year – Charlie Mirfin of Hunstanton Fire Cadets; On-Call Employers of the Year – Howdens and MN Landscapes; Fundraiser of the Year – Wymondham Watch Manager Tom Diaper; Volunteer of the Year - Dylan Steggles of Hingham; Making a Difference Award – Watch Manager Michelle Lowe, Chris Baker, Let's Talk Mental Health team, and Blue Watch King's Lynn; Partnership Award - Redwings Horse Sanctuary, Inspirational Leader Award – Western Group Manager David Copeland and Prevention Manager Llio Wyn Knight-Griffith; New Employees of the Year Award - Lucy Goldsmith and Jessica Graves; and Team Achievement Award – Crucial Crew and Payroll team.

For more on the individual stories of these awards, which were sponsored by Norfolk Safety CIC and Brancaster Parish Council, [visit our Facebook page](#).

Award-winning Adult Learning service rated 'Good' by Ofsted

Norfolk County Council's Adult Learning has been rated as 'Good' following their latest Ofsted inspection.

The inspection report praised the ambition of the service, which provides community-based and online learning for around 6,000 adults a year. The service achieved a 'Good' rating across all six areas that were inspected, alongside the overall 'Good' rating.

Inspectors commented that learners are 'highly motivated' and committed to their studies. They praised the number of people who have a 'clear plan' for their future careers and that they want to improve their economic prospects.

In particular, inspectors highlighted the work with residents of retirement homes who have increased their confidence, self-care and resilience after completing courses in basic cookery. They commented how, following the course, learners felt less isolated and 'excited to prepare and eat their own meals'.

It was also recognised that the service has responded effectively to the growing demand for English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) courses.

There was praise for the work with Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service apprentices. The inspectors saw how the course helps them to work safely while learning about the importance of health and nutrition. The report concluded that the 'apprenticeship is well matched to the needs of the fire service.'

This inspection result comes on the back of Norfolk County Council Adult Learning being named 'Further or Higher Education Provider of the Year' at this year's Norfolk

Education Awards. This followed national recognition in 2021 where the service was named adult and community learning provider of the year at the Tes Further Education Awards.

Norfolk County Council Adult Learning offers a wide range of courses for adults of all levels and interests. Whether you want to change your career, improve your skills, or pursue your passion.

Find out more about Adult Learning and browse the course catalogue at www.norfolk.gov.uk/adultlearning.

More than ten thousand Norfolk children benefit from mental health programme in first year

A children's mental health and wellbeing programme, funded by Norfolk County Council, has supported more than 10,000 in its first year.

The Rise Up programme gives children and young people valuable knowledge and strategies to support their mental health and is being delivered in secondary and special schools across the county. 93% of young people said that their ability to manage their wellbeing improved after completing the programme.

Created and delivered by Future Action, in partnership with Norfolk County Council's Virtual School for Children in Care, Previously in Care and Children with a Social Worker, the course aims to help children build confidence, reduce their anxiety, and create a sustainable wellbeing programme within 90 days.

More than 350 teachers across 62 secondary and special schools in Norfolk have taken part in the online training programme, which delivers a nine-step programme to help support the mental wellbeing of children and young people.

The RISE Up toolbox of strategies, physical activities and comprehensive set of resources allows teachers to deliver classroom and small group-based work which helps young people improve their wellbeing, understanding the challenges facing their mental wellbeing and approaches to overcoming them.

Following the successful partnership between Future Action and the Virtual School for Children in Care, Previously in Care and Children with a Social Worker, Norfolk County Council has commissioned the programme for a second year.

In its second year, the programme aims to embed the programme across more schools and staff to enable teachers:

- To identify individual young people struggling with their mental health and direct them to the specialist support they need as early as possible
- To provide more young people with a range of self-care strategies to protect and build their mental wellbeing to transform their life chances and reduce the pressure on upstream services
- To teach the link between physical activity and mental wellbeing

In addition, the council has commissioned a 'Trauma Informed PE' programme, also delivered by Future Action. The aim of the programme is to:

- Educate PE teachers about the impact of childhood trauma and the eight protective factors
- How colleagues can create psychological safety to transform outcomes in the short and long term
- The link between physical activity, play and mental wellbeing

Secondary and special school teachers or teaching assistants within Norfolk can contact futureaction.co.uk to access the courses.

Further information about the Virtual School and the offer to Children in Care, Previously in Care and Children with a Social Worker can be found by emailing Virtual.SchoolsCwSW@norfolk.gov.uk or visiting www.norfolk.gov.uk website.