



▶ ANNUAL REVIEW

2023-2024

A look at key activities across Norfolk over the past year.



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▶ **LEADER'S FOREWORD**

Perhaps it is cliché to start with remarks on how busy the past year has been, and how quickly it has gone, but in this organisation it has been the truth: Since I took on leadership of the council in May, we have experienced significant changes – some of which were internally driven, and others brought about by external factors.

We now have a Chief Executive Officer, Tom McCabe, who is providing the stability, leadership, and continuity required to head an organisation of over 7,000 people. Tom joined Norfolk County Council in 2013 as Executive Director of Community and Environmental Services, becoming Head of Paid Service in 2018 before being appointed as Chief Executive in June 2023. He has a comprehensive understanding of both this organisation, as well as the pressures felt by the local government sector more widely having also worked in other local authorities.

This report summarises our progress against our stated priorities in



last year's Council Delivery Plan 2023-24. Over the past 4 years, we have focused our efforts on delivering against the strategic priorities outlined in our strategy, [Better Together, For Norfolk 2021-2025](#). With one year of this strategy remaining, I want to pull out some of the highlights of delivery from over the past year.

2023 saw us reach further progress on Norfolk's devolution, which will bring additional powers and funding to the County, to drive growth and development, and improve infrastructure, housing and skills. I have previously been honest about how, before I was leader of the Council, I was cynical about what this might mean for Norfolk on the ground. Having had extended discussions with Government, though, I have seen for myself that the current deal is right for Norfolk – not least in the context of the significant benefits future “deeper” devolution could afford us, as we are seeing elsewhere.

It is with that confidence that I brought the deal to full council to be voted on in December 2023, where a majority of Councillors endorsed it and agreed that an election for a directly elected leader should move to May 2025, to align with the County Council elections.

We said we would take action on climate change, and following its publication in March 2023, our Climate Strategy has received national acclaim. With a clear direction set for what we want to achieve, and we have made significant strides against our net zero targets whether that's saving energy by converting street-lighting to LED, delivering electric buses or creating more charge points across Norfolk.

We have continued to make progress with digital connectivity, reaching some key milestones in 2024. Covid showed us how important broadband and mobile connectivity are for people to access services and learning, and for businesses to grow. Our innovative and quite unique Digital Inclusion strategy has helped bring all these agendas together and delivered better outcomes for many of our residents.

In Adult Social Care, we launched innovative solutions to identify how we might help people earlier, and so reduce and delay the need for further services. Using assistive technology, we have also helped many more people remain independent in their own homes. And for those for whom this was not possible, we have continued to deliver more targeted housing solutions through specialist programmes – with more to come.

Our Children's Services have gone from strength to strength, achieving



Earned Autonomy status, in recognition of transformational work and continued focus on early help and whole family working. This means that Norfolk will be able to receive all relevant funding upfront, rather than a proportion of the funding as payment by results for family outcomes. NCC is now one of only two authorities in the Eastern region to achieve this.

Our Adult Learning service was inspected by Ofsted and rated as “good” in their report published in December 2023. The service was also named as the winner of the Further or Higher Education Provider of the Year award at this year’s Norfolk Education Awards, for providing community-based and online learning for around 6,000 adults a year. It is important to note that we are making these achievements while setting a balanced budget in the face of mounting financial pressures, which continue to be considerable.

In this last year too, we have seen a continued big increase in demand for our services, particularly with adults and children’s services, which are critical services most of us don’t think about until we need them, and which are not always as visible as others such as roads, libraries, and museums. These however are the services that support those most vulnerable in our communities such as older people, people with learning or physical disabilities, or those who suffer from poor mental health, domestic abuse survivors, children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and adults or children at risk of harm.

We continue to look at how we deliver services, finding new and innovative ways to deal with increasing demand and strained budgets, but this only goes so far. You will have seen recently in the national media that the financial pressure facing local authorities, particularly county areas with responsibilities for care, has reached a critical point. Recognising this, we have made a concerted effort to influence decision-makers on areas which we cannot immediately control ourselves. 2023 saw us kick off a highly successful renewed engagement process with our MPs, which sees regular meetings held to discuss the most pressing issues facing the county, with a clear focus on actions to improve outcomes.

A recent success from these meetings was the retention of Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) Funding for our fire service when it otherwise would have been assigned elsewhere. This would have meant our nearest specialist unit equipped to deal with urban fires and disasters would have been located over two and a half hours away from the county. We will continue to expand this programme of events, reaching a wider variety of stakeholders locally, and in Westminster.

Even with the current uncertainty around local government, I know



that we can together rise to this challenge as we have with challenges before. So as we take stock on all that has happened over the past year, I know it has placed us on a good footing to deliver even more progress in the year to come.

With best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kay Mason-Billig". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Kay Mason-Billig



▶ OUR DELIVERY OVER THE PAST YEAR, IN NUMBERS

Over the past year we have:

Provided

- **19** Recycling centres.
- **15** reuse shops with over
- **1 million visits** in total per year.



We have processed

- **60,000 tonnes** of recycling, with
- **71.8%** diverted from landfill.
- **91.6%** of the remaining waste was sent to create energy.



Dedicated

£22.5 million

capital funding to decarbonise our buildings and reduced our estate emissions by a further **15%**, halving our estate emissions compared to the 2016/2017 baseline.

Served over

1.8 million visitors through our **47** libraries.



Cut bus transport emissions by **80,000** tonnes of CO₂ through **70 new fully electric buses**.

Saved **3,684,368 kWh** of energy through updating our streetlighting to LEDs.

Secured funding to install over **150** new charging sockets for Electric Vehicles (EVs).



- Delivered ultra-fast broadband to over **6,900** premises and secured **£114m+** of inward investment to connect a further **62000+** properties
- Superfast broadband now covers **97.3%** of properties in the county.



We secured **£49.5m** in Government funding in 2022 to improve bus services across the county, and since then, we have achieved:



- ▲ **31** new and enhanced bus services across Norfolk covering **1/3** of Norfolk's population
- ▲ **49** parishes now have an increased Saturday bus service
- ▲ An **18%** increase in overall passenger figures from September 2022 to 2023

Over 30,000 visits to the registrar office – which offers single point of contact & referrals to our other services

Spent £1.5 million per day on care services for adults, where we have:



<p>Received 137,000 requests for support with care.</p>	<p>Reduced our backlog of people awaiting full care following hospital by 93%</p>	<p>Supported 11,000 people home from hospital.</p>
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We continue to deliver Children's Services which are rated

 **“Good”** by Ofsted with **“exceptional areas of practice”**.


We are sharing our improvement journey with other local authorities as part of a sector-led improvement programme.


 **Norfolk County Council**

We are the lead local authority for the Eastern region's new fostering pathfinder.



We have been highlighted as providing a **“high level of support”** to a significant number of vulnerable separated migrant children, with a nationally recognised support model.



 We are a Government pathfinder for the Wraparound Childcare Scheme, moving toward the ambition that all primary aged children can access **8am-6pm childcare during term time**.



▶ INTRODUCTION

THE PURPOSE OF OUR ANNUAL REVIEW

This Annual Review reports back on the previous year's [Corporate Delivery Plan 2023-2024](#) to highlight key areas of progress across the council in the intervening time.

Rather than trying to capture every aspect of council delivery, the review demonstrates the breadth of services we deliver, and provides some highlights on how we are delivering the priorities outlined in our strategy, [Better Together, for Norfolk 2021-2025](#).

These priorities are set out below, in the form of a statement of last year's activity, followed by its corresponding update.



▶ A VIBRANT AND SUSTAINABLE ECONOMY

The key objectives of this priority, outlined in our overall strategy are:

1. Supporting skills and high-value jobs.
2. Promoting growth and investment.
3. Improving infrastructure and digital connectivity.

What we said

1. Continue to deliver the 5-year Norfolk Investment Framework (NIF), with development of longer-term strategic projects underway. The Framework will deliver £1.5m worth of pilot projects due to start in April 2023.

What we did

Norfolk County Council has delivered funding to twelve pilot projects encompassing a wide range of partners and sectors. These include investigating the possibility of seaweed farming in East Anglia, improving local workforce skills, and a range of decarbonisation initiatives such as the creation of a clean hydrogen strategy and rolling out EV charge-points to rural areas. The NIF is underpinned by a comprehensive evidence base, which highlights a number of challenges facing the county, including digital connectivity, innovation, the skills gap. Our funding has targeted intervention in these areas. More [information on the Norfolk Investment Framework and its pilot projects](#) can be found on the Norfolk County Council website.





What we said

2. Work with local partners to continue to deliver the 2021-4 Rural Economic Strategy for Norfolk, tackling issues that affect the rural community, such as skills, connectivity, access to services and infrastructure. This year, pilot projects will focus on addressing skills gaps and facilitating carbon reduction.

What we did

The activity of the Norfolk Rural Economic Strategy steering group has focused on rural needs identified within the Local Skills Improvement Plan. These are principally related to upskilling residents, improving digital connectivity and access to services. Aligned with the Norfolk Investment Framework, pilot projects include the Rural EV charging pilot and Tech Skills for Life, which aim to fulfil these needs in rural areas. Additionally, the Fixed Access Wireless Programme will bring high speed broadband to 13 village hall sites, helping better connect communities. The Rural Economic Strategy has entered its final year as a working document, with opportunities emerging to bring the rural agenda into a wider Norfolk Economic Strategy. As above, [progress on specific projects can be found on the Norfolk County Council website.](#)





What we said

3. Continue to deliver our economic plan for recovery and growth, including the delivery of the Go Digital project and Innovation Grant Mentoring Programme to help create a strong, diverse and thriving economy. Key programmes will include the business start-up day and working closely with the refugee support programme.

What we did

Go Digital supports businesses with improving digital skills and has now provided support to over 1,000 Norfolk businesses since its inception. Feedback from the programme has been excellent, with 98% happy with the engagement and application process, 97% happy with the quality of support, and 95% feeling that the programme had increased their understanding of digital ways of working. The project continues to be in high demand and funding has been allocated to continue its operation. The Innovation Grant Mentoring Programme has provided fully-funded bespoke mentoring and bid coaching for small and medium size enterprises (SMEs) who are seeking to attract Innovate UK grants. The collaborative efforts of the programme has helped address the issue where less than 0.4% of Innovate UK funds came to Norfolk and Suffolk, with 36 bids submitted to Innovate UK with a combined value of £4.8 million more recently. Support has also been provided to Start Up companies in Norfolk, where Business Intellectual Property Centres within libraries have been grant funded £226,000 to deliver a 2-year free service to aspiring entrepreneurs, reaching over 718 individuals.





What we said

4. Oversee the completion of construction for the Operations and Maintenance campus for Great Yarmouth which will provide a major boost to the region's offshore energy sector and local economy.

What we did

This £24.8 million partnership project is a collaboration with Great Yarmouth Borough Council and the New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership and aims to provide the facilities required by future investors. The construction project will see 190m of river quay refurbished, including optimisation of the land for future development. Having secured £10.4m in grant funding, the full buildout of the project will create 288,700 sq ft of lettable space, with the majority constituting office space and the remainder used for storage. It is anticipated that the campus will accommodate 650 new jobs in the offshore wind sector with recruitment expected to begin in 2026. Phase 1 of construction began in early 2023 and will complete in November 2024.



What we said

5. Work with our delivery partners to continue to run the CHANCES programme and support over 2000 longer term unemployed residents into work by September 2023.

What we did

The CHANCES programme has continued to deliver support to unemployed residents with our delivery partners through to the end of September 2023. A reprofile of the project took place in early 2023 to take into account labour market effects such as lower unemployment rates and DWP centralised provisions such as Restart. As a result, the CHANCES budget and its targets were reduced by 20%. CHANCES has successfully supported 1,699 residents (against a revised target of 1,686) in their goal of moving into or towards employment. 363 unemployed participants were supported into work (against a target of 269) and 367 inactive residents were supported into work or job search (against a target of 209). This represents 43.3% of the total cohort. This exceeds the original target which was to have a positive outcome for 22.7% of participants. Additionally 243 participants moved into training or education during the lifetime of the project. Finally, a programme has been commissioned with the aim of supporting a further 1,100 residents with health conditions into work, or for those struggling at work to retain their employment. This programme runs from October 2023 to March 2025.





What we said

6. Explore opportunities to build on the success of the County Council's Employer Training Incentive Project which supported 344 Norfolk businesses in 6 months.

What we did

NCC has been successful in securing UKSPF funding from some District Councils in Norfolk offering a similar delegated grant programme to partially support the cost of training. This will enable us to pilot activity on a district basis for the financial year 2024/25 whilst continuing to explore alternative options to fund this type of activity going forward.



What we said

7. Continue to deliver the Skills, Progression, Adaptability and Resilience (SPAR) programme which incentivises local businesses to access training in key skills including digital, leadership, customer services, and relationship management.

What we did

Led by Suffolk County Council with Norfolk County Council as a geographic delivery partner, the SPAR project (launched in 2019) concluded in October 2023. The project was funded through £1.2m European Social Investment Funding (ESIF). The project was targeted to support 153 SME's across Norfolk & Suffolk, achieving 101 results. Norfolk SME businesses receiving project support totalled 79 of the 101 SMEs which received report. The project was also targeted to support 860 participants through its duration, achieving 1388 results. The project is currently under external evaluation and the county council will await these findings.





What we said

8. Work in partnership with Great Yarmouth and King's Lynn and West Norfolk Borough Councils to deliver the new Library and Learning Hubs in Great Yarmouth and King's Lynn in early Spring 2024, which will support the development of vital skills and services in the heart of the town. We will develop plans with partners to ensure the building has maximum participation following its opening.

What we did

The council's ambitious community hubs are dynamic spaces which unite libraries, adult learning, and other services under one roof in a single location.

- In King's Lynn, significant work has taken place this year to:
 - Purchase a suitable building in the heart of the town.
 - Secure £7.4m Government Funding through the King's Lynn Town Deal.
 - Contribute £5m in funding from Norfolk County Council.
 - Lead two rounds of community engagement to gather feedback on initial designs.
 - Move into the second stage of design, focusing on sustainability, materials, and the façade appearance.
- In Great Yarmouth, significant work has taken place this year to:
 - Finalise floor plans and designs with input from Libraries staff.
 - Develop a shared brand and choose a new name for the building.
 - Work with the Borough Council and East Coast College to develop a shared curriculum offer to meet the needs of Great Yarmouth residents.
- The Great Yarmouth site is on track to open in Autumn 2024. The inception phase for the King's Lynn hub occurred as planned in Spring 2024, with a view to open it from Autumn 2025.





What we said

9. Continue to implement the priorities in the annual Norfolk Strategic Infrastructure Delivery Plan (NSIDP), including the Transforming Cities programme, and deliver on key schemes such as the West Winch Housing Access Road, the Long Stratton Bypass, and the Norwich Western Link.

What we did

It has been a positive year for our major infrastructure projects, with the Outline Business Case for the West Winch Housing Access Road submitted to government in September 2023, approval of the Outline Business Case by government for the Norwich Western Link, and planning approval for Long Stratton Bypass secured, which should allow main construction to commence from April 2024. Construction on the Great Yarmouth Third River Crossing (Herring Bridge) was completed and the bridge opened on 1 February 2024. It links the A47 at Harfrey's roundabout to the port and enterprise zone via South Denes Road on the other side of the River Yare. The NSIDP was reviewed from May 2023 with County and District Council officers working to update progress and consider any new schemes. Three new projects have been added: Hethel Infrastructure, North Walsham Western Link Road (Industrial Estate Access), and Hunstanton Coastal Defences. Following a successful bid for Government funding, the NSIDP is moving to a digital platform in Spring 2024.





What we said

10. Continue to deliver a comprehensive capital programme to maintain and improve our 6,200 miles of road, 2,800 miles of footway and cycleway, and 3,400 miles of Norfolk Trails and public footpaths.

What we did

We have delivered a programme of highway maintenance works totalling £56m, including road resurfacing and surfacing dressing, repairs to footways, improving drainage infrastructure, as well as patching and pothole repairs. We also continue to run a preventative programme, targeting potholes before they become more established and efficiently treating them when they occur. In the 2023 National Highways and Transport Public Satisfaction Survey which collects the public views on different aspects of Highways and Transport in local authority areas, Norfolk County Council achieved a ranking of 1st out of 30 County Councils that participated. Norfolk also ranked first place overall when compared to the Eastern Region County Councils.



What we said

11. We will continue to advance opportunities to deliver and promote the economic growth potential of the A11 corridor, with a focus on advanced manufacturing, engineering agri-tech and other key sectors, and make the corridor a recognised location for investment activity.

What we did

Norfolk County Council has funded a pilot project to develop a detailed clean hydrogen strategy for the Cambridge Norwich Tech Corridor (CNTC) area. The strategy will drive forward the delivery of a clean hydrogen economy in the CNTC area and will therefore support Norfolk's wider progress towards net-zero. The project partners include South Norfolk and Broadland District Council, New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership and Breckland District Council. Norfolk and the New Anglia LEP have worked in partnership to secure a share of £7.5 million of Government innovation launchpad funding, recognising the area's strengths in the agri-bio tech sectors. The launchpad will make grant funding available to innovative projects which focus on increasing productivity and improving food manufacturing and processing.





What we said

12. Complete delivery of Better Broadband for Norfolk, which aims to deliver Fibre To The Premises (FTTP) to 8821 locations by 2024.

What we did

The current delivery target now stands at 8,221, revised from the previous target of 8,821. The reduction is largely due to premises already being upgraded to Gigabit capable broadband via separate commercial programmes. Furthermore, the focus of the programme has been on connecting the most remote and hard-to-reach properties, where collapsed or damaged pipes and inflation-driven cost increases have impacted on our ability to deliver against the targeted number of premises within the property price limit.

Notwithstanding, to date we have delivered FTTP to around 6,900 premises. We are now delivering broadband to the hardest-to-reach premises which have complex builds and pose additional costs. This has also caused a delay to the programme of up to two quarters with project completion now expected mid-2024. £113K of additional funding from Government has already been agreed to complete these premises, and an additional £344K is being sought from other Government funding streams.



What we said

13. Help roll out Project Gigabit, delivering gigabit-capable infrastructure to up 86,000 of the most hard-to-reach rural premises by 2025/6.

What we did

The Project Gigabit contract was awarded in June 2023, with 62,000 premises in scope. This is a reduction from the 86,000 properties contained in the procurement, unfortunately mostly affecting the West and Northwest of the county. However, works are now under way to seek additional funding to include a significant number of additional premises, particularly in the West and Northwest of Norfolk. The delivery project is split into 6 phases, with the planning of phase 1 expected to be completed by mid-January 2024, and delivery commencing soon after. Planning of phase 2 will then commence.





What we said

14. Continue to deliver the Norfolk and Suffolk Innovation Network, focussing on increasing the use of sensor technology across the region to help our places run as efficiently as possible.

What we did

We have delivered 108 Low Power Wide Area Network (LoRaWAN) Gateways across the county in 2023-2024, making our network the largest in the UK. In plain English, this is effectively connecting our sensor technology with itself and allows it to be centrally reported. This means we can use sensor technology to make systems smarter. We are now progressing the following activities:

- We are engaging with schools and residents on air quality and working in partnership with the University of East Anglia. This includes delivering a network of connected air quality sensors across the region.
- We have engaged with Easton College on Smart Farm proof of concept, and have installed a variety of sensors to this effect.
- We have further developed sensors for use in building management.
- We are using sensors to support the delivery of Norfolk Hackathons, a coding-based competition, using the LoRaWAN network and sensors as a core topic.



▶ **BETTER OPPORTUNITIES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE**

The key objectives of this priority are:

1. Levelling up outcomes for families.
2. Raising educational attainment for children and young people.
3. Creating better employment opportunities for young people

What we said

1. Continue to deliver the Healthy Child Programme, including statutory checks for pregnant women and young children, additional support for key groups, and health and wellbeing pathways for 5-19 year olds.

What we did

In 2023/24 we completed a strategic review of the Healthy Child Programme, from which future commissioning intentions have been developed. Mandated checks have returned to face-to-face delivery and improvements have been made for the numbers of checks completed at Antenatal, Newborn and 6-8 weeks stages. The programme has ensured key groups were prioritised for engagement and interventions including young parents, looked after children, and families from diverse backgrounds.



What we said

2. Work with the Department for Education to maximise the impact of our status as an Education Investment Area, targeting investment, support and action to help children from all backgrounds to succeed at the highest levels.

What we did

Our focus in 23/24 has been on engaging with the [Government's Priority Education Investment Area \(PEIA\)](#) in Norwich. NCC has contributed to the design of – and promoted engagement with – the current PEIA offer for schools. This transition was managed by NCC on behalf of the Department for Education to jointly scope and deliver pilot projects for the PEIA in primary school writing and secondary school attendance. These pilot projects have formed the basis for the current projects now being delivered by Inspiration and Sapientia trusts. School participation in the projects is high. NCC remain represented on both the Primary and Secondary Headteachers Boards and the overall PEIA Partnership Board. As part of an extended offer to schools, NCC contributes to selection panels and the delivery of an enhanced offer to target schools through the TDT (Teacher Development Trust). This participation has secured expertise within NCC to replicate the model with other schools, and we are now considering how this work can benefit the wider Education Investment Area.





What we said

3. Take a system-wide local first inclusion approach to help intervene early and more holistically to prevent escalation of need, focusing on how we incentivise and increase mainstream inclusion practice.

What we did

The six-year Local First Inclusion programme started formally in April 2023 following Secretary of State approval of investment. The Local First Inclusion programme is being delivered through 5 Workstreams and over 80 individual projects. These projects span the full range of support for Special Educational Needs & Disabilities, and Alternative Provision, with the primary focus on local mainstream inclusion through 'SEN Support', alongside building more specialist resource bases (hosted by mainstream schools) and expanding state funded special schools. This includes, from September 2023, successfully establishing new school and community teams in 15 zones across Norfolk to enhance the prevention and early help offer supporting schools and families where their children have emerging special educational needs (SEN). The new service is already working with 320 schools in Norfolk and 600 children and young people.



What we said

4. Progress our ambitious goal of enabling more local children to have their special educational needs met in Norfolk by establishing plans for the two further new special schools identified in the SEND Sufficiency Strategy.

What we did

In July 2023, the Department for Education confirmed that Norfolk had been successful with our bids for capital funding. This means that we will be able to establish a new 170-place Complex Needs School in the Great Yarmouth area and a new 100-place Autistic Spectrum Disorder school in the Downham Market area. The Department is currently overseeing the formal process to identify and appoint Multi-Academy Trust (MAT) sponsors to operate the schools. We are actively involved in this process with a decision expected in April 2024.





What we said

5. Work to sustain the improvements of “Good” in all areas following our recent Inspection of Local Authority Children’s Services (ILACS) and work towards “Outstanding”.

What we did

The outcome the inspection at the end of 2022 was extremely positive. As part of any inspection process, it will highlight some areas for further development, and we maintain our commitment to continuous development. The three areas for development identified by Ofsted, along with our responses, are:

- The practice response to children aged 16 and 17 who present as homeless. The measures taken to improve this area of practice include developing a data dashboard, a practice guide, a joint housing protocol, training for practitioners, and focused quality assurance.
- The recognition of and response to children who are experiencing neglect over a prolonged period of time. This area of practice is already a priority for the Norfolk Safeguarding Children’s Partnership. Our further response includes the establishment of a neglect practice group and champions, the development of further practice guidance and training on the Graded Care Profile tool, and the creation of an operational oversight forum. The results of an audit have showed improvement in the identification and planning for children experiencing neglect.
- Decision-making, practice and support to children placed within their family and friends networks, which also ensures that carers are well supported and regulatory requirements are consistently met. This is an important area of practice, which has been recognised by the National Review of Children’s Social Care. We have reviewed the existing and current set of family arrangements and issued new practice guidance to establish regular senior oversight and create independent monitoring arrangements for assurance.

These areas will continue to be an important focus for the Council, expanding the focus on the voice of the child, multi-disciplinary and multi-agency practice, early help and prevention, and implementing new ways of working in response to the National Social Care Review.





What we said

6. Continue to adopt a proactive approach in planning for areas with demographic change, to ensure sufficient school places for children in Norfolk as well as efficient use of resources and value for money.

What we did

The School Sufficiency Plan was approved by Cabinet in January 2024. Through the annual Published Admission Number consultation, we have engaged with schools' governing boards and Multi-Academy Trusts to propose revised numbers which consider reduced catchment numbers for some schools. There has been increasing engagement from these stakeholders and we will continue the dialogue with them into the coming year, some areas of the county are experiencing a considerable decline in primary school age children, and this is expected to continue.





What we said

7. In light of the Independent Review of Children's Social Care, improve the experience of families seeking help, including exploring the 'Family Help' model that will allow professionals, including social workers, to operate more flexibly to meet the needs of children and families, and Joint Agency Group Supervision to share information to promote wellbeing and protect children.

What we did

The Independent Review of Social Care has challenged a number of traditional models of support offered to vulnerable families. Ahead of any national decision, we have been piloting a Family Help approach in two of our six localities, which allows us to assess the effectiveness of the model for families and also for our staff. The pilot has been operational since June 2023 and has been testing the impact of larger multi-disciplinary teams and changes to the manager role. The model has shown a reduction in the number of hand-offs between professionals (which we know families do not like), has encouraged professionals to work more collaboratively, and has enabled us to use the specialist skills of our managers to deliver better outcomes.

Our Family Help model pilot has aimed to address the features in the national response to the Review, called the Stable Home, Built on Love strategy, and we need to ensure that we are well placed to respond within the context of our rural geography. We have put in place an evaluation around our pilot, and have also submitted an application to the DfE to be a Pathfinder LA in their Families First for Children Programme which is seeking to test Family Help alongside several other priorities.





What we said

8. Establish a children and young people's system collaborative with an initial focus on multi-disciplinary community-based delivery models for children and young people with mental health needs.

What we did

The Children and Young People's Strategic Alliance System collaborative has been successfully created by chief officers across Norfolk and presents an extremely powerful opportunity to realise our ambition that all children flourish in Norfolk. The principles of the collaborative have been agreed, focusing on early intervention and prevention, 'place', looking holistically at needs, and moving away from a clinical model to one rooted in community-led early help. Recent developments have included greater integration of front door services, development of joint practice models, mental health support teams in schools and the introduction of School and Community zones. Going forward there will be two key focus areas, building a collaborative approach to supporting neurodiversity and strengthening our approach to supporting mental health and wellbeing.



What we said

9. Prepare for the new SEND Inspection Framework by undertaking a self-inspection and developing a comprehensive improvement plan, working in partnership to collectively drive better outcomes for children with SEND, and improving communications so that families better understand where to find support.

What we did

A partnership group comprising NCC Children's & Adults Services and the Integrated Care Board has met regularly since April 2023 to develop the Area SEND & Alternative Provision Self-Evaluation Framework (SEF). The Norfolk SEF has been informed by guidance from the national Department for Education SEND Adviser and NHS England leads for East of England, and also by analysis of areas who have undergone inspection within the new Framework. A first draft SEF has been prepared and agreed, and this will now be fully developed to create a version that is agreed by the partnership (including sense checking with Family Voice Norfolk as the Parent Carer Form). This will then be subject to regular review to ensure that it is in a permanent state of readiness ahead of inspection by Ofsted or the Care Quality Commission.





What we said

10. Work with partners in the education system to create a new Learning Ambition for Norfolk which will form the basis of a sustained programme of work over the coming 3-5 years to support significant improvement in learning outcomes for children and young people.

What we did

The outline of the Learning Ambition has been agreed. Sector engagement sessions were held at the start of the autumn term to agree and define five key themes: Capacity and Expertise of the Education Workforce, Ensuring Effective Transitions, Improving Data and Information Sharing, Enhancing the self-improving Standard through a Norfolk Collaborative Standard, and Supporting Resilient Families and Communities. These themes have been endorsed by the Norfolk Learning Board. The focus will now be on the recruitment of members from the system to the Priority Task Groups and identify key deliverables. The programme of activity was established in January 2024.





What we said

11. Improve the sufficiency of placements for children in care by increasing recruitment and retention of foster carers and specialist children's residential practitioners and developing better quality, local and more affordable provision.

What we did

Placement sufficiency to ensure the right provision for our children in care has been and continues to be a challenge, national and locally. Over the past few years and exacerbated by the pandemic, we have also seen the needs of children and young people increase and become more complex. In response, our strategy has evolved and has recently been updated to:

- Invest in further innovative interventions at the edge of care to reduce the number of children and young people needing to be looked after.
- Achieve a step-change in in-house fostering capacity through a whole-Council and whole County focus on carer recruitment and retention. We have already seen an improvement here, with numbers of carers likely to be maintained in 23-4 (equal numbers entering and leaving the system) after several years of significant reductions.
- Significantly re-shape in-house provision to achieve to support the changing needs of children and young people.
- Create more specialist provision for children with learning disability, autism and physical disabilities.
- In addition, Norfolk was successful in the bid to the DfE to deliver a regional Fostering Recruitment and Retention Programme, and has been appointed as the regional lead to work across 10 Local Authorities. We will “host” the new Regional Fostering Hub for the Eastern Region.





What we said

12. Deliver our revised Apprenticeship Strategy over 2023/2024, which will set out an updated action plan for apprenticeships in Norfolk across all areas of the council, reducing siloed working and ensuring better collaboration between departments. Particular focus will be placed on apprenticeships which help deliver on Net-Zero priorities.

What we did

We have developed the revised NCC Apprenticeship Strategy and Operational Delivery Plan for 2023-2025, which encompasses strategic aims to support apprenticeships in Norfolk across the council (Children's Services, Growth & Investment and Human Resources). The Strategy and Operational Delivery Plan have been approved by the NCC Apprenticeships Board, and was endorsed by Cabinet in December 2023. As at January 2024, we have employed 516 apprentices across NCC, Fire & Rescue, and schools, marking a total of 1272 since the Apprenticeship Levy was introduced in 2017. We continue to focus on the aims of our strategy, including a focus on green apprenticeships to help deliver on Net Zero priorities.



▶ HEALTHY, FULFILLING AND INDEPENDENT LIVES

The key objectives of this priority are:

1. Levelling up health.
2. Living well.
3. Delivering better local services.

What we said

1. Build on work already completed in 2022 to offer preventative support to help people live independently for as long as possible, using digital technology to identify people who might benefit from earlier help.

What we did

Connecting Communities has been a major programme of transformation over the past 18 months in Adult Social Services. We set out to offer more effective short-term services to everyone we support and make every initial engagement count, helping people to stay independent for longer, and are on track to achieve our targets. We have increased our re-ablement support through Norfolk First Response, helping more people remain independent in their own homes.

Our new ways of working have promoted collaborative, strengths-based practice. We have introduced an innovative new digital platform which analyses millions of factors to identify people most likely to benefit from early help and prevention. Individuals with vulnerability risks are proactively contacted and offered a range of interventions to alleviate or reduce these risks. A pilot to prevent falls (a major cause of hospitalization for older people) was launched in May 2023, and has led to 700 people being referred to services and activities targeted at their needs.





What we said

2. Continue to engage and work with the Norfolk Strategic Housing Partnership to achieve our goal of No Homelessness in Norfolk and continue to deliver the Norfolk Homelessness Prevention Strategy.

What we did

The provision of affordable housing continues to be a key area of focus for all partners, particularly through this period of high cost of living, and increasingly unaffordable private rentals. This is a thorny issue that no single authority is able to resolve in isolation, and over the next period the County Council will work with partners to explore the opportunities that arise from devolution of brownfield funding in Norfolk, to unlock housing sites which would not have been possible to exploit otherwise. Over the past year, the focus for Adult Social Care in this area has been to fully integrate our duty around Domestic Abuse as a key priority for the partnership, ensuring that the needs of victim-survivors are considered at every step. Going forward, our Domestic Abuse Commissioning Manager will be part of the action review group.



What we said

3. Continue to fulfil our duties under the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 to meet the needs of victim-survivors living in safe accommodation. Work is ongoing to deliver the [Support in Safe Accommodation Strategy](#), a key aim of which is to increase the amount of flexible accommodation and quality of support for victim-survivors fleeing domestic abuse in Norfolk.

What we did

We have continued to fulfil our duties under the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 to meet the needs of victim-survivors living in safe accommodation in Norfolk. We have done this by recently refreshing both the Domestic Abuse Needs Assessment and Support in Safe Accommodation Strategy. We continue to focus on increasing the amount of flexible accommodation and quality of support for victim-survivors. Since April 2022 we have increased the number of bedspaces for those fleeing domestic abuse from 54 (all for women) to 101 (some of which can now be used by male and female adult as well as their children). In addition, we have been able to improve the quality of the support being provided in safe accommodation by designing and introducing a Quality Assessment Framework, with which to monitor and advise on continuous improvement.





What we said

4. Continue to deliver the Public Health Wellbeing Programme, including rolling out a new provider framework for weight management interventions from April 2023, as well as continuing to support people needing Drug & Alcohol treatment services and support to quit smoking.

What we did

In 2023/24 we:

- established our revised approach to weight management interventions, including an exercise programme, and embedded a self-referral model through our [Ready to Change website](#);
- appointed a new provider for our specialist 'stop smoking' support service, Smokefree Norfolk;
- increased drug & alcohol treatment places for criminal justice clients, countywide; increased employment opportunities for people affected by drug & alcohol misuse through the Individual Placement and Support Service; and initiated a countywide housing support service for those in drug & alcohol treatment.



What we said

5. Continue to deliver Project ADDER in association with partners, which has been extended until 2025 due to its success. The project is a key feature of the Government's 10 Year Drugs Strategy, From Harm to Hope.

What we did

Project ADDER delivery has continued and expanded, with the establishment of a countywide ADDER criminal justice team and increasing the number of treatment places by opening services to alcohol misuse clients. The County Council has continued to work in partnership with the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner to deliver the national strategy locally through the Norfolk Community Safety Partnership. The governance and programme delivery structures for Serious Violence and Combatting Drugs have been fully integrated, leading to better collaboration and more efficient systems. This model has been recognised as best practice and included in Home Office Guidance.





What we said

6. Work with key agencies in the new Norfolk Drug and Alcohol Partnership to deliver positive outcomes locally with regards to reducing drug use, drug-related deaths, crime and harm, as well as reducing drug supply and increasing engagement with treatment and recovery. Priorities will be agreed in 2023.

What we did

The Norfolk Drug and Alcohol Partnership has agreed the following four key priorities:

- **Dual Diagnosis (DD):** Develop pathways that support engagement, treatment and recovery for people experiencing both mental health and substance misuse issues.
- **Continuity of Care (CoC):** Prison to Community Treatment: Ensure that those moving between prison and community treatment do not fall through the gaps at a particularly vulnerable time.
- **Workforce development:** Identify if staff have access to appropriate training and, if gaps are found, to develop appropriate packages of training.
- **Project ADDER expansion:** Implement best practice on enforcement, treatment and recovery, drawn from the Greater Norwich ADDER pilot (which focused on heroin and crack users in contact with the criminal justice system) – across the county, including for treatment pathways relating to alcohol and recreational drugs.

It has also made progress in expanding elements of project ADDER countywide and improving transfer rates for prison to community treatment. The County Council continues to invest a significant proportion of its Public Health grant in drugs and alcohol prevention.





What we said

7. Continue to deliver the Independent Living programme and the Supported Living Capital Housing programme, including 12 new units of bespoke accommodation for people with complex needs during 2023.

What we did

As a result of the Supported Living programme 15 homes have been developed for people with complex needs – people have been able to move from institutional environments into real homes in communities. 12 young people are living independently and learning the skills they will need to grow into successful independent lives. Planning is in progress for nearly 60 homes in 3 localities which will provide homes for people with a range of support needs and reduce the use of residential care and institutional environments.

Independent Living provides older people with high quality accommodation and on-site care and support. So far over 120 homes have been provided and people living there are vocal about the benefits of living independently as part of a community.





What we said

8. Complete the work at all existing sites agreed under the Changing Places toilets initiative, which helps increase independence and quality of life for people with complex needs and disabilities, and consider any further sites that the funding allows.

What we did

Work is underway across the five identified sites:

- Acle, Gressenhall, Wroxham and Dereham have completed the final stages of design and are about to move through the planning process. We anticipate construction will start on these sites in the summer-autumn of 2024
- Brancaster is a collaborative project alongside the National Trust to bring the Changing Places facility to life as part of a wider National Trust-led redevelopment.
- In addition to the five pre-identified sites, we are incorporating Changing Places provision in our new Community hub sites in Kings Lynn, Great Yarmouth and Hunstanton, meaning that by 2025 Norfolk County Council will have developed 8 new Changing Places sites across the county.



What we said

9. Build on the work completed to improve Home Care provision, including delivering our strategic plan over the next year to continue driving improvement to the market.

What we did

We have begun the implementation of the Home Care Strategy, with the first phase going live in August in the Primary Care Network areas of Great Yarmouth and Waveney, Gorleston and North Norfolk. The first phase will be completed by April 2024, when the new contracts for those Primary Care Network areas will go live. The next phase will begin in April 2024 and cover West Norfolk and the rest of North Norfolk. The implementation of this strategic approach will support the drive towards improving quality of care provision and the ambition in Norfolk for everyone to be able to access good and outstanding social care.





What we said

10. Continue to play a key leadership role in the Integrated Care System (ICS) to improve population health and care, tackle unequal outcomes, enhance value for money, and support social and economic development.

What we did

NCC has established a key leadership role in the ICS, chairing the Integrated Care Partnership, and the attending the Integrated Care Board. The ICS has embedded structures for delivering its ambitions at a community level and NCC has developed senior leadership for each ICS 'Place', including coordination of Health and Wellbeing Partnerships through a collaboration between Public Health and District Councils. We have reviewed the Better Care Fund, our ICS' largest joint commissioning arrangement, in line with new agreements at place level, whilst maintaining County-wide commitment to equality of access, consistent service models, and developing a deeper strategic relationship with health services.



What we said

11. Continue to prepare for expected social care reform, using the delay announced in the Government's Autumn Statement to rescope our project programme to improve our efficiency and outcomes for people.

What we did

Reform from Government has not been immediately forthcoming. The cap on cost of care and means testing reforms have been postponed until after the next general election. In the meantime, we are continuing to lobby Government for long-term sustainable funding to support the changes to our care costs associated with these reforms. This is a national issue and other authorities will also be in this position.





What we said

12. Adopt the new Community Risk Management Plan (23-6) and action plan within our Fire and Rescue Service and make Norfolk safer through its prevention, protection and response activities.

What we did

NFRS has adopted and is delivering against the Community Risk Management Plan (23-26) and our improvement action plan to make Norfolk safer through our prevention, protection and response activities. We have made significant progress against our Proposals, including:

- Developing a more targeted approach to prevention activity across Norfolk's communities, prioritising vulnerable people and those at highest risk.
- Aligning our specialist water capability to the locations of greatest risk.
- Amending the way we calculate and report our emergency response attendance time to align with the Home Office and HMICFRS.
- Reviewing and improving our readiness to respond to summer heatwave conditions.
- Continuing our collaboration with other emergency responders by progressing the development of local participation in the Emergency Medical Response (EMR) scheme.
- Commencing the planning phase of undertaking a detailed review of the On-Call Model in tandem with an anticipated national review.



▶ **STRONG, ENGAGED AND INCLUSIVE COMMUNITIES**

The key objectives of this priority are:

1. Facilitating involvement and participation.
2. Building capacity within the voluntary and community sector.
3. Helping empower our communities.

What we said

1. Continue to work effectively with the VCSE sector and take a whole system approach to the way we support residents in the county. We will build on work already undertaken to agree commissioning approaches and develop an overall set of principles that look more broadly at the way the council communicates, engages and works with the sector.

What we did

Through the continued funding of the Empowering Communities Partnership of VCSE infrastructure organisations, we have enabled the sector to access training, advice and peer support opportunities. This year we have been working with the sector to help halt a national decline in volunteering through supporting a Norfolk Vision for Volunteering and advocating for a coordinated system-wide approach.





What we said

2. Work with the VCSE sector to develop a volunteering strategy for Norfolk, delivering a set of properties for volunteering across the County to support communities, improved mental health and wellbeing, and develop innovative opportunities for people gaining vital work experience to support aspiration.

What we did

We have worked closely with Voluntary Norfolk over the past year to identify trends contributing to the decline of volunteering. While many of these factors are national trends and therefore outside of our control, work has undertaken to develop a Volunteering Strategy for the organisation based on the key issues identified in Voluntary Norfolk’s Vision for Volunteering (launched November 2023) in the county and measures which can be taken by Norfolk County Council to address volunteer decline. The Strategy will further be developed following input from key stakeholders, with a view to publish it in Autumn 2024.





What we said

3. Work with VCSE and local council partners to continue to deliver the Hardship Support Programme to provide financial support to Norfolk households where this is necessary, and develop sustainable long-term solutions for hardship in our communities.

What we did

Since the launch of the Household Support Funding programme, Norfolk County Council has been allocated over £33m to support vulnerable residents in the county. The 4th round of the funding scheme launched in April 2023. As of the time of writing, Government has extended the fund by a further 6 months.

Over the past year the fund has been allocated as follows:

- Client Hardship Services (formerly the Norfolk Assistance Scheme) - £3.3m
- Support for families who receive Free School Meals - £7.2m, this funds weekly cost of living vouchers of £15 per month, per child, with an additional payment of £30 in December to coincide with the Christmas holidays.
- Local support in the community provided by District/Borough/City Councils - £2m.
- Support targeted to voluntary and community groups - £0.8m, local organisations have been able to apply for grants to support vulnerable clients over winter in a scheme managed by the Norfolk Community Foundation.
- Support available from libraries - £0.2m, including free winter bags which will include hot water bottles, blankets and draught excluders, 'Just a Cuppa' sessions, where people can meet and chat, while enjoying a hot drink. Other service offerings are covered in the followed item (4).
- Support for six local charities who provide a range of advice including work, benefits, money and debt as well as mental health support for young people, information and advocacy - £0.3m.



What we said



4. Continue to promote Public Health campaigns through our libraries, using them as an essential part of the provision of NHS health checks for local communities, as well as offering all libraries as warm spaces throughout colder months.

What we did

We have successfully promoted Public Health Campaigns in our libraries and hosted NHS health checks throughout the County, providing access to health checks at rural accessible venues. Our libraries have acted as warm hubs during the colder months, providing free hot drinks to all, along with providing hot bottles and draught excluders to those in need. We also ran free slow cooker courses in conjunction with Adult Learning. This was alongside our Tricky Period offer and Toiletries To Go. We have supported mental health, especially in men, by continuing our Read My Mind Project and expanding this to other activities which invite men to come along meet with peers and exchange conversations.

What we said



5. Continue to meet the legal duties of the Armed Forces Act across council departments by implementing the duty of due regard to the principles of the Armed Forces Covenant, and promote the Covenant internally and with partners, where possible.

What we did

We have implemented the duty of due regard throughout our organisation, such as within our Equality Impact Assessments (EqIAs) process and have provided a reference document for frontline employees in adult services on how they can better support and signpost residents who are veterans or part of a service family to the help they need. As lead partner for the Norfolk Armed Forces Covenant Board, the council has supplied information to the national Forces Connect App to help increase awareness of the support available to the armed forced community through a variety of charitable and public sector bodies. The council continues to support the work of the Covenant through organising workshops, funding recruitment media outreach and supporting charities to reduce social isolation, and commissioned a [needs assessment for the local armed forces community](#) which is publicly available.





What we said

6. Continue to offer investment in infrastructural support to the VCSE sector, focussing on funding and finance, advice and support, volunteer recruitment and deployment, and training.

What we did

We remain committed to funding and developing Norfolk's VCSE Infrastructure offer. In 2021 Norfolk County Council committed additional funding to infrastructure acknowledging the additional challenges facing the sector post covid and with the cost of living crisis. The Empowering Communities Partnership brought together the key support organisations to provide high-quality coordinated and targeted support and services to strengthen the VCSE sector and enable organisations to access the help they need. The partnership is funded until September 2024 and within its first two years has:

- Provided a single front door and a joined up VCSE sector support programme
- Encouraged and enabled wider volunteer engagement
- Built VCSE capacity and capabilities
- Strengthened VCSE leadership and collective voices



What we said

7. Continue to work with partners and stakeholders to better connect the support we commission and make it simpler for residents to access the help or services they need.

What we did

NCC has funded universal access to the Norfolk Community Advice Network (NCAN) referral system until March 2024 to provide a single approach for referrals. We continue to look at how we better connect our own services and have delivered training to our reception areas to ensure the first welcome into our building is friendly and approachable.





What we said

8. Continue to roll out our ambitious 3-year Digital Inclusion Strategy to ensure that Norfolk residents have access to the digital skills development and connectivity they need for their lives and work, and look at innovative ways to use technology to upskill our staff and improve the ways we work with partners and communities.

What we did

The council's [Digital Inclusion Strategy](#) was refreshed in December 2021 and a partnership programme set up in January 2022 including the council, health colleagues from Norfolk and Waveney ICB, VCSE and District council colleagues. The council has surpassed its strategy's annual target within 8 months to refurbish over 1,000 devices, helping get individuals better connected who may be on tight budgets. A library laptop/tablet loaning scheme was launched last August and up until December 2023 over 500 loans have been made. The authority again surpassed its strategy target of 1000 by supporting 3295 adult learners with digital skills training through to December 2023. The council has piloted an innovative new service which provides wraparound tech support by way of four local community tech coaches – you can read more about [Tech Skills for Life West Norfolk here](#). The Digital Inclusion Strategy is aligned to the council's Corporate Strategy, Better Together, for Norfolk and also runs until 2025.



What we said

9. Deliver a fourth year of Digifest, which will aim to inspire the next generation of coders, creators and tech innovators.

What we did

Over the years, Digifest has been a great success, and has continued to attract and inspire young people. DigiFest 2023 included 112 events with 719 participants at libraries across the county. A strong majority (88-98%) of participants reported improved knowledge, skills and attitudes towards digital technology. Activities included coding with robots like Botley and Codeapillar, 3D printing, stop-motion animation and educational Minecraft. There were also basic digital skills sessions for adults which partners such as Adult Learning and ICT solutions helped to deliver.



▶ A GREENER, MORE RESILIENT FUTURE

The key objectives of this priority are:

1. Protecting and enhancing our environment.
2. Providing access to quality spaces.
3. Increasing community resilience.

What we said

1. Begin to implement our climate strategy which sets out a comprehensive approach to reducing our carbon emissions, protecting nature and adapting to change.

What we did

With its Climate Strategy in place, the council is now setting out action plans that translate its vision for a low carbon county into practical delivery. Two tranches of actions have been published so far, with the final tranche due in summer 2024. These actions will be reported on and updated each year to help inform residents on progress being made to deliver on the ambitious Climate Strategy. Key highlights to date include securing investment for 70 zero emission buses in the county (more information is included in the update for activity 3 below, as well as securing funding for around 80 electric vehicle public charge-points in rural and tourist areas and installations of charge-points in parts of Norwich with little off street parking. The County Council will publish its Walking, Wheeling, and Cycling Strategy in Spring 2024 which will help enable 50% of journeys in towns and cities to be completed on foot, scooter, or bike.





What we said

2. Continue to implement projects from our Local Transport Plan (LTP), and ensure it is aligned with carbon reduction targets expected from the Department for Transport in summer 2023.

What we did

The LTP4 Implementation Plan sets the target to achieve Net Zero carbon emissions from transport by 2050, in line with the government's Net Zero Strategy. New Local Transport Plan guidance was expected as early as 2022, which the Department for Transport were expected to publish Quantifiable Carbon Reduction (QCR) guidance along with. However, at the time of writing the QCR and LTP guidance have still not been published.

In advance of the emerging guidance on carbon quantification, Norfolk County Council has already demonstrated tangible action towards carbon reduction throughout our Climate Strategy, fourth Local Transport Plan, Environmental Policy (2019) and the wider list of transport proposals. The County Council has been successful in securing additional funding to advance de-carbonisation in the county, these funds include the following with more information on the funds covered in other activities:

- Transforming City Fund (TCF).
- Zero Emission Transport City (ZETC).
- Zero Emission Bus Regional Area (ZEBRA)
- Bus Service Improvement Fund (BSIP).
- Active Travel Fund (ATF).





What we said

3. Aim to further reduce our own emissions, including through further rollout of LED streetlighting and the commencement of a multi-year building retrofit programme.

What we did

In alignment with our commitment to achieving a net-zero estate by 2030, we have made significant strides in upgrading our lighting infrastructure to energy-efficient LED units since 2008. In 2023 alone, we successfully converted over 8,732 streetlights, surpassing the two-thirds mark of our total streetlighting stock. This conversion resulted in a substantial in-year electricity reduction of 28%, equivalent to 3,684,368 kWh of energy and 785 tonnes of carbon. Our ongoing efforts are directed towards completing the LED conversion of the remaining streetlights by 2025, targeting a total of 15,000 units. This will contribute an additional 1,100,717 kWh in energy savings and reduce carbon emissions by 245 tonnes. Information on our energy savings from retrofit is covered in the response for activity 6 below.



What we said

4. Continue to support our residents in reducing their own emissions, including through the rollout of electric buses in the Norwich area and a programme of installing EV charging points.

What we did

The council has been successful over the past year in securing funding for zero-emission buses, with £14.7m secured from the Department for Transport and £21m from operator First Bus, bringing 70 fully electric buses to the county. Additionally, the First Bus depot at Roundtree Way will become one of the first fully electric bus depots outside of London. 7 electric buses have been delivered and are already operating in Norfolk, with the remaining 63 going on the roads before the end of March 2024. This switch will reduce CO2 emissions by more than 80,000 tonnes, which is equivalent to taking around 4,700 small petrol cars off the road. Work to install new EV chargers in Norfolk continues at pace, following successful funding bids for the Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Fund (LEVI) and funding through the Norfolk Investment Framework. Combined, this will bring over 150 new charging points for use across the county.





What we said

5. Work with our partners in the Norfolk Climate Change Partnership and the Integrated Care System to take forward actions where a collaborative approach is the best way forward.

What we did

We supported a successful bid led by Great Yarmouth Borough Council for Innovation UK's Fast Followers funding to help Norfolk citizens to get the support and information they need to feel confident to take up low carbon technologies such as improving their home energy efficiency, installing a heat pump or making their next car electric. The council has been engaging with our district partners through the Norfolk Climate Change Partnership on creating an Energy Plan for Norfolk. When created, this will improve coordination between development plans across the county and energy infrastructure investment so that Norfolk's growth and energy needs in a net-zero future can be met.



What we said

6. Continue to work towards our commitment to making our estates net-zero for carbon emissions by 2030, a climate strategy and associated action plan is planned for launch in Spring 2023.

What we did

Norfolk County Council is making steady progress on decarbonising its estates with a 15% reduction in emissions over 2023 compared to the previous year. We have worked at pace to halve our current estate emissions against our 2016/2017 baseline and expect to have achieved a 66% reduction by 2024/2025. This places the authority well on track to achieve net-zero by 2030, where the authority will have reduced its carbon footprint by 90%, with certified offsets accounting for the remaining 10%.





What we said

7. Build on progress towards nature recovery by continuing to deliver the 1 Million Trees for Norfolk Programme. We will publicly engage on our new Green Infrastructure Strategy in February 2023.

What we did

A significant programme of tree-planting work involving partners including local communities, schools, and parish councils is continuing strongly, and NCC is working towards the next major milestone of 400,000 trees planted across the county by the end of the planting season in March 2024. As we have newly recruited our Head of Environment, work is taking place to consolidate our strategies and plans in this space, and as such there will be more to report on relating to biodiversity net-gain and nature recovery on our delivery plan for 2024-2025.



What we said

8. Continue to deliver waste reduction initiatives and deliver improvements to the recycling centre network, with new sites being considered in the Sheringham, Wymondham, Long Stratton and North Walsham areas.

What we did

We continue to encourage households to reduce the amount of waste they throw away through a series of initiatives which include reduced price home compost bins and advice. These include a Food Savvy communications campaign, which focuses on planning, storage and using up leftovers, as well as our Refill campaign, which aims to reduce the number of single use products used in Norfolk. Planning applications are being progressed for new recycling centres for Sheringham and Wymondham Recycling Centres and land searches are underway for new sites in the Morningthorpe and North Walsham areas.





What we said

9. Continue our work to deliver 'Norwich Castle: Royal Palace Reborn', our £13.5m (now £15m) project to transform Norwich Castle's iconic Norman Keep.

What we did

The Norwich Castle: Royal Palace Reborn project is approaching completion, with the transformed Norwich Castle Keep expected to reopen to visitors in summer 2024. The £15m funded project which includes investment from a large number of external stakeholders is one of the largest heritage projects of its kind currently underway in the UK. The project has seen the Castle's medieval floors and rooms rebuilt to their original state, so that everyone can experience a Norman royal palace and its stories. The new offer will provide a high quality and accessible visitor experience of national significance, including a major new British Museum partnership gallery of medieval life.



What we said

10. Continue to work to improve Norfolk's green travel networks for the benefit of both people and the environment, through Greenways to Greenspaces, which this coming year will include identifying new sites for roadside nature reserves and the opening of five new walking routes in partnership with the Norfolk Platinum Jubilee Committee.

What we did

In the past year the Greenways to Green Spaces Team have worked to substantially improve Norfolk's green travel networks for both people and the environment and have identified 112 new candidate sites for Roadside Nature Reserves. On 11 May 2023, five new Jubilee Trails were launched in Norfolk in partnership with the Norfolk Platinum Jubilee Committee, to commemorate Her Majesty's Jubilee. The aim was to create trails which were within reach from all over Norfolk, where possible. The routes are The Elizabeth Way (Heacham to King's Lynn), the West Acre Way (Gayton to West Acre), The Wendling Way (Dereham to Gressenhall), the Chet River Circular (Loddon to Chedgrave) and The Eastern Maritime Way (Great Yarmouth to Lowestoft – cycling trail).





What we said

11. Continue to deliver the Dark Skies programme to help protect the remaining dark landscapes in the UK. Working with partners, we will continue to deliver events to promote the programme and help reduce light pollution across the county.

What we did

Dark Skies was piloted in 2023 with funding support from the Interreg EXPERIENCE project. The Norfolk County Council Protected Landscapes team runs various small-scale events over the past few years under the umbrella of the Dark Skies Festival.



What we said

12. Continue, as Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA), to play a key role in protecting our communities from the impact of coastal and inland flooding, making additional funding of £1.5m available in each of the next two years and working with partners in the Norfolk Strategic Flooding Alliance (NSFA) to help address agreed priorities.

What we did

Norfolk, as the LLFA and at the time of writing, has received 819 reports of flooding so far from April 2023. Of those 279 meet our thresholds for formal investigations, which are continuing. Storm Babet in October 2023 caused the greatest impact with 137 properties flooding internally. The majority of these properties were in and around Attleborough. Due to the exceptionally high rainfall across the Region over many months of 2023, long term groundwater issues are affecting many areas in west, north and east Norfolk.

The NSFA continues to work with its partners on priority schemes across the County. Drainage improvement and flood mitigation works have been installed in Besthorpe, Brockdish and Bighton Road, and Acle. Recent work has also focussed on the maintenance of drainage systems, rivers and watercourses, issues around coastal change, and identifying the changing nature of flood risk related to climate change and how Norfolk can be prepared for and respond to that.





What we said

13. Invest, subject to the confirmation of Active Travel England, the award of Active Travel Phase 3 funding of almost £1m to deliver 3 further Active Travel schemes over 2023/2024, namely Jellicoe Road in Great Yarmouth, Middleton Road in Gorleston, and Mile Cross Road in Norwich.

What we did

The schemes mentioned above are currently going through design reviews with Active Travel England, with a further £739,000 successfully awarded to assist in delivery of these.

In January 2023 we were invited by the Department for Transport to bid for further capital funding for cycling and walking infrastructure schemes as part of Active Travel 4, and were successful in being awarded £2.24m in March 2023 to deliver eight active travel schemes across Norfolk with the emphasis on pedestrian crossings near 4 schools in Dereham, Fleggburgh, Brundall, in 2023-24. Other crossing and cycle lane schemes in Thorpe St Andrew Kings Lynn, Hunstanton & Sandringham are being delivered in 2024/25. At the same time, we were awarded a further £100,000 to support revenue funded work.

We continue to engage with Active Travel England to seek funding to deliver our top two schemes in Gorleston and Bradwell to the value of £1.045m. We are awaiting the outcome of these discussions. We are also delivering some £3m worth of cycling and walking improvement schemes in West Norfolk as part of their Active and Clean Connectivity (A&CC) programme linked to £25m of Town Deal funding. The schemes are moving through design with several smaller schemes delivered and the remaining to be completed by March 2026. Schemes in the Greater Norwich area are being delivered as part of the Transforming Cities Programme.





OPERATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

This section is not an explicitly mentioned priority within Better Together, for Norfolk, but features in Corporate Delivery Plan 2023-2024. This seeks to capture the cross-cutting work taking place across the organisation to improve efficiency and customer experience.

What we said

1. We will continue to advance progress towards our County Deal, working with our partners to develop strong models of delivery and collaboration. It is expected that County Councillors will have the opportunity to vote to endorse the leader and change the Council's model of governance, to have a leader directly elected by the public, later in 2023.

What we did

On 12 December 2023, Norfolk County Councillors voted to endorse the in-principle devolution agreement with Government, which would bring:

- in excess of £600m of un-ringfenced investment to Norfolk over a period of 30 years, to invest in business support, innovation, and much needed infrastructure
- nearly £7m of brownfield funding, to support the delivery of much needed homes
- c.£40m in integrated transport budget, and
- c.£12m in Adult Education Budget to focus on targeted skills provision that meets the needs of our local economy
- The County Council also resolved to apply to Government to move the date of the election of a Directly Elected Leader to May 2025, to coincide with the County Council elections. This was agreed with Government in late 2023 and the Council is scheduled to vote on the change of Governance at its meeting on 23 July 2024. In his Autumn Statement on 22 November 2023, the Chancellor also announced a further level to the Devolution Framework, Level 4, which sets a new ambition for Norfolk and reinforces the Council's position that Devolution is a journey.





What we said

2. Phase two of the Strategic Review will be developed in 2023, with implementation expected in 2024/25.

What we did

- The review conducted in 2023 delivered efficiencies and savings for the Council by:
 - Removing areas of duplication, including in support services,
 - Adjusting the number of management layers and improving spans of control
 - Improving the Council's organisational design to be more efficient in decision making and organisation of work.
 - Simplifying how the Council describes roles and organise into professional groupings for consistency and support career development and equality
- The learning from the first phase of this review has given managers the tools and knowledge to look at continuous improvement with the right capability and capacity. Services will continue to drive efficiencies through reviewing structures and models of work, as well as continue to deliver existing programmes of transformation in line with the design principles agreed in 2023.





What we said

3. Design principles for a Portfolio Governance transformation model to reduce duplication and improve efficiency have been agreed as part of the Strategic Review and the detailed design and implementation stages are being planned for delivery in 2023-2024.

What we did

- In April 2023 we began work to strengthen our governance of the portfolio of change across the council and ensuring strategic alignment and prioritisation. The approach is being co-designed and produced with departments to ensure that it supports the most effective approach to delivery of positive benefits and outcomes for the people of Norfolk.
- A phased approach has been taken to developing and implementing the model. A Portfolio Board has been set-up to provide oversight to the delivery of our corporately significant programmes. This is supported by the collaborative portfolio team which has members from the corporate centre of the council and service departments. We have recruited staff with specialist transformation skills to work alongside colleagues in directorates to improve efficiency, reduce duplication and deliver positive outcomes for those who use our services.
- As part of the portfolio management approach we also launched the Organisational Design Authority. This is a group that supports and steers the design of departments and teams within Norfolk County Council to ensure changes we make to our structure and functions matches the capability we need to deliver successfully. It consists of specialists in business and organisational change alongside services and functional specialists.





What we said

4. We shall continue to develop and learn from our Smarter Working Programme so hybrid-working facilities are meeting needs across the organisation

What we did

- The Smarter Working Programme has undertaken a range of activity which sought to optimise employee and service effectiveness. This includes assessing employee experience of hybrid working arrangements, updated training and support for NCC reception staff, and updating the County Hall Car Parking policy.
- Hybrid working remains highly valued by those whose roles allow them to make use of it, with flexibility, cost/time savings and better recruitment being key factors.
- As part of last year's consultation, Smarter Working has been absorbed into the new Continuous Improvement (CI) function with effect from January 2024. The processes and mechanisms to support this change were developed and embedded during January & February 2024. CI typically focuses on solving problems that affect colleagues across the organisation and are not owned by a single Executive Director.



What we said

5. We will regularly monitor and review the implementation of our Workforce Strategy, which runs to 2025, to ensure it is on-track and fit for purpose. This will include conducting surveys with employees amongst other metrics.

What we did

We have scheduled plans to review the workforce Strategy with the council's Executive Directors every 6 months. The results of the 2023 Employee Survey have been launched and there are plans to refresh the workforce strategy to look at what has been delivered and is working well, what gaps still exist and what changes to the longer term strategy requires, following a PESTLE analysis.





What we said

6. We will continue to review deliver our Digital Strategy, which focusses on key improvements such as public access to WiFi, automation of some council processes, and bolstering cyber-security.

What we did

- Digital connectivity across the County has continued to improve, with Superfast Broadband now available at over 97.3% of properties and Gigabit speed fibre to the property broadband now up to over 56.7%.
- The Council has provided and maintained a free to use LoRaWAN / IoT Innovation Network which now covers the whole of the County and enables sensors to connect to the Internet for various public and private sector use cases.
- Mobile coverage has also been improved through the first phase of the national Shared Rural Network Programme, and we have commissioned a new scheme to measure mobile coverage using refuse vehicles and fire appliances as they travel around the County.
- We have greatly increased Digital Inclusion Programme activities during 2023/24, helping thousands of residents to get online and develop greater digital skills and confidence, as well as providing over 1,000 laptops to help people who needed them.
- The Digital Strategy Programme of work has used automation and artificial intelligence (AI) tools to improve many aspects of the Councils operations
- We have continued to develop and deepen our cyber security capabilities in order to prevent cyber criminals attacks and minimise the time to respond to any disruption they may cause.



What we said



7. There will continue to be ongoing reviews of our property, determining where further consolidation and exploitation of assets can be achieved. Where possible, we will continue to release surplus property.

What we did

The Council has undertaken several reviews on properties in our portfolios, which have identified a number of opportunities to make the best use of our buildings, including releasing land where appropriate. These include, but are not limited to: Havenbridge House, Wensum Lodge, Norman House, Ipswich Road; as well as a number of small land parcels. Work is ongoing and will continue in line with the Council approved Strategic Asset Management Framework 21 – 26.

What we said



8. We will continue to deliver Net-Zero improvements through better cross-departmental working, including our climate change strategy which brings together various teams to deliver our key objectives.

What we did

The council has earmarked £22.5 million of capital funding to decarbonise its buildings as part of maintaining trajectory towards our net zero 2030 estate commitment. The money will be invested in improving building energy efficiency and shifting from gas or oil heating to low carbon heat pumps with work beginning in 2024. Around forty chargepoints are now up and running at County Hall for staff and visitors, and a further thirty chargepoints currently being put in across fifteen other sites including fire stations and libraries. These are enabling Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service to transition their smaller emergency response vehicles from diesel to hybrid through 2024.





MEASURING OUR PERFORMANCE

In Corporate Delivery Plan 2023-2024 we provided some indicative vital signs which aligned with each of our corporate strategy priorities with a view to report back on these after a year had elapsed.

Many of these vital signs have now changed in order to ensure that they are more meaningful metrics for measuring performance, and provide more alignment with our key activities and strategic priorities.

In order to view the most up to date vital sign data, readers should access our [organisational performance reports](#) which come to cabinet on a quarterly basis and are publicly available. The most recent reporting at the time of writing took place on the [cabinet meeting on 8 April 2024](#).





Norfolk County Council