

Government announce that it supports three unitary councils for Norfolk

The Government announced this week that it supports three unitary councils for Norfolk.

Cllr Kay Mason Billig, Leader of Norfolk County Council, said:

"I was briefed this morning by the minister, Alison McGovern, confirming the government's decision that it is minded to support 3 new councils for Norfolk. We await the details of the rationale behind this decision and will carefully consider this against the criteria the government set out for reorganisation. We must examine what this decision means for our residents, partners and services.

"We are clear that the Government must ensure that the full costs of reorganisation are met and that implementation arrangements are robust, realistic and fully deliverable. It is not acceptable to push these costs onto local councils and taxpayers.

"Our concern is that essential local services are protected and that any new arrangements provide stability and long-term sustainability for our communities.

"Our priority remains safeguarding frontline services and ensuring continuity for the people of Norfolk."

Five for a fiver on Norwich Park & Ride

Norfolk County Council is reducing the price of group tickets on all Norwich Park & Ride services from this coming Sunday (29th March). Groups of up to five people will now be able to enjoy all-day travel on Park & Ride services for just £5 making it even better value for families and cheaper than parking for more than 3 hours in most city centre car parks.

The reduction has been made possible thanks to funding from the government for Norfolk County Council's Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) which secured an allocation of £14.8m for 2026.

Passengers can catch frequent buses every 10-20 minutes from five conveniently located Park & Ride sites. There are late buses and Sunday services from every site making it a great and flexible choice for even more people.

Thanks to the bus priority measures that have been delivered on the ground, such as bus lanes and bus gates on every route, journeys on the Park & Ride services are fast and reliable and drop off in the heart of the city centre.

Park & Ride tickets, which are for all day travel, cost; £3 for a single adult and just £2 for concessions (ENCTS bus pass holders and young people 5-19). Two people can travel together for just £4 and now five people can travel all day for just £5.

For more information visit www.norwichparkandride.co.uk

Connect to Work scheme receives almost 1,000 referrals in first few months

A scheme to help people with long-term health conditions find and stay in employment has received almost 1,000 referrals in its first few months and is already making a difference to people's lives.

Connect to Work aims to build on the achievements of the previous Working Well Norfolk and Local Supported Employment projects and reduce the county's higher-than-average economically inactive population.

A total of 109,100 (20.6%) of individuals aged 16-65 in Norfolk were classed as economically inactive in 2024 and 30,100 (27.7%) were identified as having long-term sickness, compared with 23.7% in 2019. This is higher than the East of England figure of 25.9% and the UK average of 27.2%.

The Department for Work and Pensions has commissioned Norfolk County Council to run the scheme, and it is being rolled out through delivery partners Future Projects, Local Supported Employment, Norfolk and Waveney MIND, Seetec, Shaw Trust, and Standguide – potentially to more than 4,000 people.

Connect to Work launched in December 2025 and is aimed at people aged 18 and over from Norfolk (and 16-17 in some cases) from a wide range of cohorts. These include people with mental and physical health challenges, learning disabilities, neurodiversity, care leavers, carers, military veterans, ex-offenders, the homeless, refugees and victims of domestic abuse.

People who are in work but at risk of having to give up due to their health condition or other complex challenges will also be supported by the UK Government-funded programme.

Pupils pitch to 'Dragons' to secure funding for school active travel campaigns

Scratch cards to reward active travel and a whole-school walkathon were just two of the initiatives presented by pupils at a Dragon's Den-style event held at County Hall.

Teams of students from across the region pitched their ideas for active travel campaigns in a bid to secure funding for their school at the Campaign Junction on Monday 16th March. Up to £200 was available for each school group and could be used for anything from competition prizes to a bike stand.

Schools taking part were Framingham Earl High School, Ormiston Venture Academy, Beccles High School and Bungay High School. The judging panel was made up of Esme Holtom, AtoBetter Travel Plan Coordinator, and Edgar Fernandez, WSP Sustainable Travel Planner.

Campaign Junction was hosted by Norfolk County Council's AtoBetter Project and delivered by Keith Woodward, Active Travel Ambassador Coordinator (East of England) from Modeshift, a leading national organisation promoting sustainable travel.

The Active Travel Ambassador (ATA) programme, funded by Active Travel England, works with high schools and local authorities to increase and promote active travel to and from school, supporting students to develop the confidence and skills needed to promote lasting behaviour change.

To learn more about how schools can get involved next year, visit: [AtoBetter school programmes](#).

Nine new Specialist Resource Bases to open this year

Nine new bases providing 110 specialist places are opening at mainstream primary schools this year as part of Norfolk's Local First Inclusion programme to increase capacity for children who need additional support.

Specialist Hubs of Inclusive Practice (SHIPs) are now open:

- Roydon Primary School near Diss (16 places)
- King's Park Infant in Dereham (8 places) - already open from the February half term

From Easter:

- Holly Meadows School in Pott Row near King's Lynn (16 places)
- The temporary SHIP at Sprowston Junior which will move into its new building, increasing capacity from eight places to 16
- A new Speech, Language and Communication Needs SRB at Necton Primary near Swaffham (10 places)
- A new social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) SRB at Magdalen Academy in Wiggshall St Mary Magdalen near King's Lynn (8 places)

From September, pending planning and building work:

- A new SEMH SRB at St Williams Primary in Norwich (16 places)
- A new SEMH SRB at Toftwood Infant and Junior in Dereham (16 places)
- A new autism SRB at Lingwood Primary Academy (12 places)

Five additional SRBs for autistic children and young people are due to open in 2027, including a new permanent base at Greyfriars Academy in King's Lynn to replace the temporary base which opened last year.

Expanding SRB capacity is one part of the county council's Local First Inclusion (LFI) programme which is transforming SEND education. LFI is strengthening support in mainstream schools so more children with additional needs can attend their local school with friends and siblings, whilst also increasing specialist provision through SRBs and special schools and strengthening support for children at risk of exclusion.

[Find out more about SRBs.](#)

[Watch short films about SRBs on the Norfolk SEND Local Offer Facebook page.](#)

National Updates

New consultation to help children to enjoy healthier diets

In order to help parents to provide their children with a healthy diet, the government is set to adopt a new model to assess the healthiness of food and drink.

Food and drinks identified as 'less healthy' by the government's updated Nutrient Profiling Model (NPM) would be restricted from being placed in certain locations in stores, from volume price offers that encourage over-purchasing such as get 3 for the price of 2, and subject to advertising restrictions on TV before 9pm and online at any time, subject to consultation.

Applying the new NPM to junk food advertising and volume price restrictions could lead to 110,000 fewer cases of childhood obesity and up to 520,000 fewer cases of adult obesity in the long term.

The new model, based on the latest dietary recommendations, looks at the healthiness of food and drinks based on their balance of nutrients – calories, salt, saturated fat, protein and fibre – and also free sugars which are added to products or released during food processing.

Adopting the new model will mean some products often marketed as healthier but which contain hidden sugars or are high calorie and are often a driver of childhood obesity – such as certain sweetened cereals and fruit yoghurts could be in scope of the restrictions.

This will strengthen the impact of the existing restrictions, give parents a far clearer picture about what they are buying and encourage industry to reformulate so food marketed at children is healthier.

More information can be found [here](#).

Children and parents to pilot social media bands, time limits and digital curfews at home.

Social media bans, digital curfews, and time limits on apps will be piloted in the homes of 300 teenagers in a first of its kind trial by the UK government.

Running alongside the [digital wellbeing consultation](#), which is closing on 26 May 2026 and has already received nearly 30,000 responses from parents and children, the pilots will last 6 weeks and test how different restrictions affect young people's day-to-day lives.

Both the children and the parents taking part will be interviewed at the beginning and end of the pilots to understand the impact limiting social media has had on their family life, sleep and schoolwork.

The participants will also be asked about the practical challenges they have faced, for example the ability to set-up parental controls or the workarounds that the teenagers may find to bypass them.

Data from the pilots will be assessed by government officials and a panel of academics alongside the public's responses to the consultation responses. The data gathered will help ensure the government's next steps to give children a healthier digital upbringing are based on the latest evidence.

The government has also launched the '[You Won't Know until You Ask](#)' campaign, providing families with immediate practical support to have a conversation with their children about the content they see online.

Homes England acquires Carrow Works in Norwich

Carrow Works is a 17-hectare site with distinctive heritage and proximity to the city centre and riverside and represents a significant opportunity to deliver a high-quality, thriving neighbourhood.

Homes England will work closely with Norwich City Council and partners to develop detailed proposals for the site. Engagement with residents, stakeholders and local organisations will play a key role in shaping the future of Carrow Works and ensuring its heritage is sensitively managed and integrated into a new urban quarter for the city.

Carrow Works forms part of the wider East Norwich Strategic Regeneration Area (ENSRA) which has been identified by Norwich City Council for the delivery of up to 3,500 homes. It will also feature a new employment space, public spaces, and improved access to the rivers Wensum and Yare, The Broads and surrounding green spaces.

For more information on Homes England please see [here](#).

