July 2026

Reform cuts local highways and community funding

Norfolk CC's new Reform administration has announced the end the annual Local Members' Fund and the Community Fund available to councillors. The decision was taken using the leader's executive power, with no debate or vote whatsoever.

The Local Members' Fund has been particularly useful in supporting small-scale highways schemes in our villages, many of which would otherwise have gone overlooked. In recent years, it has helped fund or support SAM2/3 signs, vehicle-activated signage, enhanced road signage, drainage schemes, speed monitoring surveys, feasibility studies for speed limit reductions, footpath and pavement improvements, pedestrian crossings and much more.

These schemes are often brought forward in response to serious local concerns, including accidents and, in some cases, fatalities. I am very concerned that this decision will mean far fewer local highways improvements are possible, particularly in villages and on B and C roads, which already too often feel overlooked.

Several villages had schemes that I was keen to support, and this will now be significantly more challenging. My group will be challenging this decision at the next Full Council meeting, in the hope that funding can be returned to councillors and communities who understand local issues best.

The future of Parish Partnership Funding is also expected to be reviewed by the new minority administration.

Police and Crime Commissioner by-election

It is difficult to get enthused by the forthcoming Police and Crime Commissioner by-election. The process is expected to cost around £2 million and will fill a post that is due to be abolished in two years' time.

My Liberal Democrat group called for the by-election not to take place, with the existing Police and Crime Panel continuing the functions of the Police Commissioner for the next 2 years instead. In my view, that money would be far better spent on frontline policing.

Local Government Reorganisation

The new Reform UK administration has launched a judicial review against the Local Government Reorganisation process. This is expected to cost a significant amount of money and is widely considered to have little chance of success.

The Government announced its “minded to” position back in March, proposing that three unitary councils replace Norfolk’s eight district councils and one county council. This was widely considered the “least bad” option, although many of us remain sceptical about the logic of these changes altogether.

At this stage, I believe we should be working towards the smoothest possible transition to a new council structure, rather than adding further risk and uncertainty. I will keep you updated as things develop.

Children’s Services Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND) support plan

Norfolk has published a three-year plan to improve support for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities.

The Norfolk Local SEND Reform Plan has been developed following extensive engagement with children and young people, families, schools, early years settings, colleges, the NHS and the voluntary sector.

The plan responds to a request from the Government for all areas to submit a Local Plan by 19 June. It focuses on support that can be introduced now, ahead of national legislation which will bring further change, and builds on work already under way through the council’s multi-million-pound Local First Inclusion programme to transform SEND education.

If approved by Government, the plan could see 90%, around £195 million, of the council’s historic Dedicated Schools Grant SEND deficit repaid.

Stalham Extra Care Scheme reaches topping-out milestone

A topping-out ceremony has marked a key milestone in the delivery of 61 Extra Care homes for over-55s in Stalham, to be known as Albion Gardens.

The scheme, delivered by Housing 21 with Norfolk County Council and North Norfolk District Council, will provide modern one- and two-bedroom apartments with 24/7 on-site care, supporting independent living.

The development will include communal facilities and is due to open in spring 2027, helping meet growing demand for flexible adult social care housing in the local community.

Parish Council meetings

With multiple town and parish councils creating many diary clashes, I will not always be able to attend every parish council meeting much as I would like to. However, I am very happy to meet councillors and clerks outside the usual meeting schedule, and I have already been pleased to do this with a number of parishes.

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