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Final chance to help vulnerable residents with Digital Switchover.

The upgrade of the UK's telephone network to replace old analogue copper landlines with digital technology will be completed in January 2027.

This means that from early next year, all phone calls will go through the internet and anyone who relies on a traditional landline will not be able to use it. Please also note that after the switchover is complete, digital phones won't work during a power cut unless they have battery backup.

Telecoms providers are required to supply this free of charge to vulnerable customers (older, with health issues, without a mobile phone or with poor mobile phone signal), so it's important that those affected, or those who support them, contact the relevant provider so arrangements can be made to protect their customers' services. People using alarms such as Telecare can get free support with the switchover from copper to digital landlines. Providers will send out engineers to help users and check the functionality of their alarm systems.

If you know anyone who could be affected by this, please remind them about the upcoming changes. If they have problems obtaining a battery, please let me know. Read NCC's digital switchover webpages for more detailed information.

Helping with heating oil costs – the Norfolk Heating oil crisis fund

Help may be available for Norfolk residents struggling to afford heating oil and keep their homes warm. Heating oil support and application details are on the council website here. Support is funded through the UK Government's Crisis and Resilience funding.

Funding to help organisations help those at risk of falling into crisis

The next phase of Norfolk's Crisis and Resilience Fund will fund 26 voluntary and community organisations across the county to provide advice, support and practical help for residents facing hardship.

The £4 million funding is part of the County Council's wider Crisis and Resilience Fund. Replacing the Household Support Fund in 2026, it combines immediate support for residents facing hardship with longer-term action to help people avoid future crises. The Crisis and Resilience fund is funded by the UK Government.

Details and grant recipients are in the council's press release here.

For help with food and energy costs, including heating oil, visit www.norfolk.gov.uk/costofliving.

Norfolk County Council Budget Consultation 2027-28

Residents can help shape Norfolk County Council's 2027–28 budget by commenting on council tax and spending proposals.

Views are sought on a proposed council tax increase and 86 budget proposals totalling £32.273m in efficiencies and cost reductions, contributing significantly towards a balanced budget. Overall spending is set to increase next year - but with significant pressures being felt due to increased demand for council services, particularly in adult social care and children's services, and costs of inflation and reduced funding from central Government, the authority is facing a £35.927m budget gap.

The consultation closes on 7 December 2026. For more information and to respond, visit: www.norfolk.gov.uk/budget. Findings will go to county councillors before final budget decisions in February 2027.

Norfolk renews commitment to billion-pound devolution deal

Norfolk County Council has renewed formal consent for a Norfolk and Suffolk Mayoral Strategic Authority (MSA), bringing the devolution deal closer. It would oversee transport, skills, housing and economic growth, with devolved powers, funding and access to a long-term investment fund exceeding £1.1 billion. Potential benefits for residents and businesses include coordinated cross-county transport investment, training linked to local job opportunities and joined-up housing and infrastructure. The MSA could attract further investment, support local businesses and strengthen both counties' voice with Government.

Renewed consent was needed after changes to the Government's mayoral election timetable and national devolution framework. Proposals remain subject to statutory approvals and confirmation of final funding amounts. Suffolk County Council must also decide whether to renew its consent, with its decision expected in November. The first mayoral election is currently scheduled for May 2028.

Norfolk Fire & Rescue Service rated good by inspectors

Norfolk Fire & Rescue Service has received inspection results from His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary, Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS). The report praised the service for making 'significant progress' since its last inspection, with all previously identified areas for improvement having been addressed.

The improved rating of good reflects their continued focus on making improvements to ensure the safety of Norfolk and its people. The service has focused on increasing protection and prevention work in communities, made significant investment in new technology and equipment and planned well for current and future risks.

The report highlights significant improvements in seven areas, while also recognising increased levels of demand and limited resources, as Norfolk has a low proportion of spend per head of population compared to other parts of the country.

The full report can be found on the HMICFRS website and the county council news release is available here.

National Updates

Budget speech

The Chancellor of the Exchequer presented the Budget 2026 to Parliament on Wednesday 28 October 2026.

The accompanying Budget 2026 Fact Sheet: Delivering for Every Region sets out measures intended to give councils and strategic authorities greater control over funding and local growth. It aims to empower places through devolution, back local city and town strengths to drive reindustrialisation, and unlock cities' and growth corridors' potential to spread opportunity to surrounding areas.

Proposals include moving towards full local business rates retention by the decade's end; extra funding for affordable and council housing, regeneration and local projects; and fewer Government grants and reporting requirements. Planned fiscal devolution includes a greater local business rates share and powers for Strategic Authorities to introduce an Overnight Visitor Levy. As devolution arrangements develop, these measures could give places more say over funding for economic growth, housing and regeneration.

Personal Independence Payment review

The Timms Review co-chair update confirms the national Personal Independence Payment (PIP) review has finished gathering evidence.

PIP helps with extra disability and long-term health condition costs. Respondents valued PIP but raised concerns about the claims process and barriers.

The final report, expected this autumn, will recommend how PIP could better support for extra costs and everyday life.

Carer's Allowance: Government findings from their call for evidence

The Government has published its findings on the future for the Carer's Allowance drawing on 3,805 individual responses, over 90% from carers, and 55 organisational submissions.

Concerns included unpaid carers' financial security, complex rules, overpayments and the difficulty of combining care with work or education.

Carers with fluctuating earnings, including those doing shift, seasonal or zero-hours work, reported particular difficulties, with some limiting hours or turning down

additional work because of concerns about losing entitlement or later having to repay money. Respondents wanted a system that is simpler, clearer and more predictable, and which better reflects the reality that caring responsibilities and earnings can change. There was also strong emphasis on recognising the contribution unpaid carers make to families and communities

The Government proposes to publish its response in the new year.