

Update from County Councillor Tom FitzPatrick

COVID-19 Trusted sources of information

The most recent **verified data on cases in the UK and Norfolk** is available from [Public Health England](#) and [Norfolk Insights](#).

Everyone has a key role in promoting www.nhs.uk/coronavirus and www.gov.uk/coronavirus as trusted sources of information to the public. It is important to ensure people go to the right sources of information and keep up to date with how to look after themselves.

Keep up to date: We have [a dedicated webpage for coronavirus updates](#) in Norfolk and impact on Norfolk County Council services. This is updated regularly so please do re-visit this page.

Service updates: The most up to date information on council services can be found at [Norfolk County Council services disruptions](#). The council will continue to monitor its services and, if regulations and circumstances change, it will review its current plans.

Latest national announcements

Updated coronavirus guidance

- Temporary and precautionary measures to prevent the spread of the new COVID-19 Omicron variant in the UK came into force today.
- From 4am today (Tuesday 30th November) face coverings are compulsory in shops and other settings such as banks, post offices and hairdressers, as well as on public transport unless individuals are exempt from doing so.
- All travellers arriving into the country from 4am today (30th November) will be required to take a PCR test on or before day 2 and self isolate until they have received a negative test result. These PCR tests can be purchased from private providers. Free NHS tests are not valid for this purpose.

The Cabinet Office has issued [updated guidance](#) to remind people of the actions they can take to help reduce the spread of coronavirus and help reduce the pressure on the NHS over the winter months.

People are at higher risk of catching or passing on COVID-19 in crowded and enclosed spaces, where there are more people who might be infectious and where there is limited fresh air. As such, businesses should continue to ensure they have [adequate ventilation](#) and people should wear face coverings if in crowded or enclosed spaces.

The guidance also recommends that people take a rapid lateral flow test before attending any higher risk spaces to give piece of mind that they are unlikely to be infectious. As workplaces start to draw up plans for Christmas parties, employers may therefore wish to encourage staff to take a test before any activities to reduce the risk of people spreading the virus without knowing it.

Library Services:

Libraries launch reading club for Norfolk's 0-5s

Norfolk's Library and Information service are launching Story Explorers – a reading club for children aged 0-5 years old.

The scheme hopes to boost the number of books that Norfolk's youngest residents interact with, something that is crucial in every child's development. Reading for pleasure is the single biggest indicator of a child's future success, even more so than their family circumstances.

The Story Explorers will feature a loyalty club for readers to help them track their progress and reward them along the way. This will include a welcome pack, reading journey map, stickers and a certificate for each reading milestone.

Parents will be kept up to date with the latest news and advice to help them get started. They will be offered reading lists with selected books; information on language development milestones; and tips and advice for encouraging speech, language and reading

Sign up started last Thursday (25th November).

Contact your local library to sign up and for further information.

Children's Services:

Norfolk social workers scoop gold and silver national awards

Social workers from Norfolk County Council's Children's Services have scooped gold and silver awards at the prestigious Social Worker of the Year Awards.

The annual national awards ceremony gave awards in 12 categories and Norfolk was recognised in two of them. A senior social worker won gold in the practice educator of the year category, and the council's unaccompanied asylum-seeking children team won silver in the social justice advocate category.

The practice educator of the year award recognises social workers involved in mentoring and supervising students and newly qualified colleagues.

The social justice advocate award seeks to recognise social workers who demonstrate a commitment to challenging injustice, seek to equalize the position of different social groups and challenge discriminatory systems.

Rapid response vehicle for people in mental health crisis launched

A rapid response vehicle specifically geared at answering 999 calls for mental health emergencies has been launched.

- Crewed by a paramedic and a specialist mental health practitioner, the car will respond to 999 calls across Norfolk and Waveney where there is a mental health concern.
- The new vehicle will be staffed by a paramedic and a specialist mental health practitioner and will respond to any calls across Norfolk and Waveney where mental health is a concern.

Launched by the region's mental health service provider, the Norfolk and Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust (NSFT), the project is a collaboration with the Norfolk and Norwich University Hospital and the East of England Ambulance Service Trust (EEAST).

- The service will run for an initial five-month period, available to be called from 3pm until 1am on Saturdays, Sundays and Mondays.

NSFT's first response helpline is also available 24 hours a day seven days a week for anyone experiencing a mental health crisis. Call 0808 196 3494

Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service:

Drink drive campaign.

Norfolk Fire and Rescue services are supporting the media launch of the multi-agency winter drink- drive campaign.

- This week they are re-enacting a crash scene at sites across Norfolk, with the first being outside Sprowston Fire Station in Norwich. The hard-hitting scene is aimed to make drivers think twice before getting behind the wheel after drinking alcohol or taking drugs. They are planning similar scenes in King's Lynn and Dereham town centres and possibly other locations, still to be finalised.
- This year's campaign also includes colleagues from East of England Ambulance Service, Norfolk Police and NCC's Road Safety team.

The aim is to educate drivers of the effects of their actions - on themselves, their victims, and whole communities who are impacted by avoidable collisions.

Information on the Norfolk Household Support Fund for Winter

Background details

There will be families in Norfolk who will face financial hardship this winter and will need help with things like paying the bills and buying food.

The Government announced its Household Support Fund (HSF) on 30 September 2021, allocating a one-off £6.69 million to Norfolk County Council to be spent by the end of March 2022 to alleviate winter hardship while the economy recovers.

The fund is to support residents with financial uncertainties, providing a bridge between the end of furlough, the reduction in Universal Credit, and unprecedented increases in the cost of household bills and fuel. There is a major focus on supporting families, with at least 50% of the fund to be allocated to households with children.

Using the strong relationships we have built up to deliver Covid support, Norfolk County Council has worked with district councils and the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector to put together a strong support offer using this one-off funding from the Department for Work and Pensions Household Support Fund.

What approach is Norfolk County Council taking?

Norfolk County Council has distributed the UK Government's Household Support Fund to a range of organisations and support services who are best placed to give support to those who need it most.

Knowing that there is likely to be extra demand for support this year against already stretched resources, we are continuing to work collaboratively and using the existing partnerships with the districts, boroughs, and city council, as well as the VCSE sector to direct funding to where it is most needed. Where possible the funding will be proactively targeted to vulnerable groups and to bolster existing services, like means-tested free school meal support over the holidays, and the Norfolk Assistance Scheme, so that these services can support more people and at pace.

The best way for people in need to get help is from organisations that they already know and are in contact with. Voluntary and community organisations, frontline staff in district and county councils and schools are well placed to identify people and families in need and offer support at the right time, before their needs escalate.

By being proactive and helping people we already know will be struggling, many people in Norfolk will receive extra support this winter without having to ask for it.

Whilst the fund is for immediate help and support, we have attempted to work towards more sustainable solutions that promote independence where we can.

What support is available?

Norfolk Assistance Scheme (NAS) £1.2million

NAS already provides hardship support to Norfolk residents who are struggling with their living costs. This year the service will receive additional funds to be able to support more people over the winter months.

- The type of support that NAS provides is tailored to the individual needs of each household. It can include food vouchers, help with buying school uniforms and gas or electricity meter pre-payments, purchasing oil and a range of other support as needed.
- We have also invested in additional advice capacity that NAS can refer to. This means that as well as one-off financial support, people struggling with their finances will find it easier to access debt and welfare advice and support to find longer term solutions.

[Norfolk Assistance Scheme \(NAS\) - Norfolk County Council](#)

Support for families who receive Free School Meals £2.4 million

All schools and educational establishments in Norfolk will have received communication about ensuring that all children who are eligible are signed up for free school meals (the means tested pupil premium element and not the universal free school meals that all children in reception to the end of year 3 are entitled to).

Schools are then able to provide a link and code for Edenred which is the chosen provider of supermarket vouchers to the value of £55 per child for the two weeks over Christmas and £15 a per child per week voucher at February half term - these vouchers can be used at the following shops: Aldi, Sainsbury's, Tesco, Asda, Morrison's, Iceland, the Company Shop Group, Waitrose, McColls and M&S.

It is anticipated that the additional funding per child at Christmas will enable family budgets to stretch to cover additional costs at this time, and help Norfolk children to enjoy the festive period.

Children who are home educated and may be entitled to the vouchers can complete the Norfolk Assistance Scheme form and will be supported to access Edenred by NAS. For more

information about free school meals click here [Free school meals, school meals and milk - Norfolk County Council](#)

We have already spent £417,000 of the £2.4 million funding on food support through the October half-term.

Support targeted to voluntary and community groups £1,000,000

Norfolk Community Foundation has set up a fund so that frontline voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) organisations can deliver vital winter aid to the people they support.

Norfolk VCSE organisations, as well as town and parish councils and faith groups, will be able to apply for funding to deliver £50 vouchers for groceries / household essentials (supplied through Edenred). Where vouchers can't be used because someone lives in a very rural area or does not have access to the internet, groups can offer a grant of £50 cash instead. The vouchers or grant will be given to the charity that applies for it, and they will then pass this on to those needing support.

Funding for support with energy and other bills will be initially directed to Age UK Norfolk, Norfolk Citizens Advice and Mancroft Advice Project. Once this approach is tested, more organisations will be added. Any enquiries to be part of this approach should be directed to the Norfolk Community Foundation.

Referrals can be made via the NCAN system or direct referral where NCAN is not in use (see table at the end)

Where no prepayment meter is in place organisations are able to make payments directly to energy companies - there is no cash alternative. Where individuals need support with the purchase of oil, a referral will need to be made to NAS who have specific links to oil providers and access to tariffs. For more detail about who can apply, for how much and when please go to <https://www.norfolkfoundation.com/funding-support/grants/groups/norfolk-household-support-fund/> (scroll all the way down the page for full information and the apply button).

NCF will also communicate with wider VCSE organisations how they link people up with longer term support offered via District Council teams and NAS so that they can be helped past the initial £50 sum where needed.

Food support £500,000

We will work with local councils to ensure that local foodbanks are provided with support where needed to meet additional needs of residents over the winter. Many foodbanks are reporting that they are well funded and seek to find longer term solutions for people to eradicate the need for foodbanks in the future.

Support available from libraries £132,000

From the 21st December Norfolk's network of 47 libraries will offer free hygiene packs with essential toiletry and sanitary products, as well as 'warm and well' packs including things like blankets and warm socks. People will be able to go to libraries and pick up these packs in a discreet way, when they need them.

Other support

We are exploring ways we can provide winter support to some specific groups of people who do not always access mainstream support, such as Carers, Gypsy, Roma, Travellers, and those supported by the Council's People from Abroad Team. This will be promoted through the relevant channels once funding is confirmed.

Local support in the community provided by district councils £1,400,000

Funding has been divided up in proportion to the number of Universal Credit claimants in each district as follows:

Norwich	£301,000
Great Yarmouth	£275,800
King's Lynn and West Norfolk	£221,200
Breckland	£193,200
South Norfolk	£151,200
Broadland	£128,800
North Norfolk	£128,800

City, district, and borough councils are using their in-depth knowledge about their residents and local community to proactively target support to where it is most needed. This support will be delivered through existing local organisations and council services who come across individuals and families in need. City, district, and borough councils will be in touch directly with partner organisations with more detail about their individual schemes. Links to local council officers for more information can be found at the end of this briefing. To ensure adequate funds are allocated at a local level we will continue to review demand and spend with each local council and make adjustments accordingly.

How long is this funding in place?

This additional Government funding for winter support **ends in March 2022**. Vouchers/ grants can be distributed until the end of March 2022 and must be redeemed/ fully spent before the end of April 2022. Edenred vouchers will expire on 30 April 2022. We will review the demand and funding allocations at the end of December to reprofile to meet need as necessary.

How can people access support?

People can go to www.norfolk.gov.uk/wintersupport to find out how to access the support available. Organisations and support workers can also do this on people's behalf. If people have problems accessing online services, then they can visit their local library or call us on 0344 800 8020.

What can I do to help?

If you are working with, or aware of, a family who you think may be eligible for free school meals, who are not currently receiving them, please encourage them to speak to their children's education provider or support them in that conversation where needed.

Please direct people to the website www.norfolk.gov.uk/wintersupport so that they can find the right support for their needs.

If someone needs emergency help with food or fuel, then direct them to the Norfolk Assistance Scheme www.norfolk.gov.uk/NAS or tell them to call 0344 800 8020.

Who can I contact for further information?

- Hardship Support General Information – Ceri Sumner, Director Community, Information and Learning, Norfolk County Council ceri.sumer@norfolk.gov.uk
- Norfolk Assistance Scheme and the support on offer - John Baldwin, Head of Finance Exchequer Services john.baldwin@norfolk.gov.uk
- Free School Meal vouchers and support for families - Sarah Jones, Director of Commissioning, Partnerships and Resource sarah.jones2@norfolk.gov.uk
- VCSE, libraries and wider community support - Natasha Morter, Head of Communities, Communities Information and Learning natasha.morter@norfolk.gov.uk
- Broadland District Council's support offer - Mike.Pursehouse@southnorfolkandbroadland.gov.uk
- Breckland Council's support offer – Samantha.Armitage@breckland.gov.uk
- Great Yarmouth Borough Council's support offer – Sue Robinson earlyhelphub@great-yarmouth.gov.uk 01493 846375
- King's Lynn and West Norfolk Borough Council's support offer - Judith.Berry@West-Norfolk.gov.uk
- Norwich City Council's support offer – covidhub@norwich.gov.uk
- South Norfolk Council's support offer - Mike.Pursehouse@southnorfolkandbroadland.gov.uk
- North Norfolk District Council's support offer - Sonia.Shuter@north-norfolk.gov.uk

Referral routes for fuel support:

Charity	Criteria	Offer	Turnaround	Referrals
MAP	County wide, must be between ages 11 and up to 26 th birthday. Cannot support older parents with children.	Spot purchase, payments	Will process on a 2-weekly basis unless emergency requires a faster payment	NCAN Referral System Self-referral via telephone or email: 0800 744454, info@map.uk.net
Age UK Norfolk	County wide. Age 50 and over, requests can come from carers and family members.	Payments	Will process weekly	NCAN Referral System and all normal routes into the Advice Line: Telephone: 01603 787 111 Email: advice@ageuknorfolk.org.uk For Information and Advice: 0300 500 1217 (Monday-Friday 10am to 4pm)
Norfolk Citizens Advice	County wide, no other restrictions	Spot purchase, payments, vouchers	Will process on a 2-weekly basis unless emergency requires a faster payment	NCAN referral system; NCA offices, Advice Line: 0800 144 88 48 Email: https://www.ncab.org.uk/email-advice-form webchat: https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/about-us/contact-us/contact-us/web-chat-service/

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