

County Council News
By County Councillor Marie Strong
marie.strong@norfolk.gov.uk
07920 286 597

Norfolk County Council Budget Consultation

You will have received your copy of 'Your Norfolk' which contains details of the budget and the consultation. I hope as many people as possible will respond because attention is paid to what you say. Last year (2013) the council asked for views on its Putting People First strategy for saving £189m over three years. As a result of that consultation the council has already agreed £40m of savings for 2015/16.

However, the financial position of the council is constantly changing and latest forecasts are that the council needs to find a further £12.9m in savings next year (2015/16). This is because: there have been further reductions in grant from the Government; demand for services is increasing; it is proving difficult to make all the spending cuts previously agreed; the council will receive less money from the Better Care Fund than expected

Nearly £12m of the £12.9m shortfall has already been identified, mainly through efficiencies such as streamlining working practices, making better use of resources and buildings, buying services more effectively, and maximising the benefits of new technology. Others have now been brought forward by the four service committees (Adults, Children's, Environment, Development & Transport, Communities) to close the remaining gap.

All proposals are on the basis that there will be no increase in Norfolk County Councils' Council Tax demand in 2015/16, but the council is asking people for their views on this, and their views on using a Council Tax increase to protect specific services from future cuts.

As well as the details in 'Your Norfolk' there is a summary of proposals out for consultation at www.norfolk.gov.uk/budgetandservices. You can have your say online at www.norfolk.gov.uk/budgetandservices or by email haveyoursay@norfolk.gov.uk. If you do not normally have access to the website remember our library staff are always willing to assist you. And there are full details in 'Your Norfolk' as to how to respond by post. The consultation closes on 19 December. The budget will be set by Full Council (84 County Councillors) on 16 February 2015.

Better Broadband for Norfolk November Update:

At the end of September 2014 BT had exceeded its contractual commitment having provided access to fibre based broadband infrastructure for over 92,000 Norfolk premises. This has involved installing over 650 kilometres of fibre optic cable, and implementing 350 cabinets, to date. You will be pleased to know that the programme is reaching increasingly rural and tourist areas. Whilst this means an increase in the level of Traffic Management required every effort is being made to carry out this work with the minimal of disruption. I am quietly confident that when such disruption reaches our division we will be patient knowing it means better broadband is reaching us. Please remember to regularly check the website www.betterbroadbandfornorfolk.gov.uk to see which parishes will be next upgraded. You should also find a link whereby you can put in your postcode for verification. In any case when your town or parish is named asked your ISP (internet service provider) what they can offer you in terms of speed and at what cost. Then as with all 'purchases' shop around.

Norfolk Libraries helping mature people to get to grips with technology:

I frequently supply readers with useful websites and email addresses and the good news is that Norfolk's libraries are coming together to help people become more confident with computers and smart with smartphones this October. Digifest is a series of events being put on by Norfolk Library and Information Service across the county throughout the month of October to help people feel more assured about using technology. I know some residents of Hindringham visit Wells library, so do check out what support is on offer. And all readers are reminded that it is free to join the library and free to borrow books, e-books and magazines. DVDs, console games and CDs can also be borrowed at reasonable prices. For more information about library services, how to join and events, ask at your local library or visit: www.norfolk.gov.uk/libraries.

Health:

Dementia Friendly: I know several towns and parishes are becoming 'Dementia Friendly' and Wells Community Hospital has a lovely dementia friendly garden which everyone and anyone is welcome to visit. In addition to the garden the hospital offers dementia activity sessions and a delightful programme of 'Music for Memory' to which volunteers, carers and people with dementia are most welcome. (Ring the hospital on 013238 711 996 for details)

Active Norfolk:

Responsibilities for Public Health have now been transferred to Norfolk County Council and you may find it interesting to look at a short video from Active Norfolk which offers information on how we can improve our health even without going to a gym. The video can be seen at <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=NcOC8yCAIfQ>

Norovirus

To end on a little note of caution. We are being urged to help prevent the spread of Norovirus. Sometimes known as the winter vomiting bug, Norovirus is highly contagious and outbreaks places such as hospitals, nursing homes and schools, are common because the virus can survive for several days on surfaces or objects touched by an infected person – and put vulnerable people at risk. To prevent its spread we are asked if we suffer from vomiting and diarrhoea – or who has been in contact with someone with these symptoms – to remain at home and off work for at least 48hrs after our last symptoms. For more advice and information visit www.nhs.uk/norovirus.