



Latest Information, Advice, Useful Links and Service Updates (Updated 18 March 2021)

This is a very fast-moving situation and our focus right now is on delaying the spread of coronavirus and ensuring our services are responding well. This is clearly hugely important and requires all of our attention.

The information below is intended as a resource to keep you up to date with the latest information and advice.

Covid-19 Trusted sources of information

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

- **Childhood Commission launched** - Dame Rachel de Souza, Children's Commissioner for England, has launched a once-in-a-generation review of the future of childhood by the Children's Commissioner's Office. ['The Childhood Commission'](#) will be inspired by the ambition of William Beveridge's pioneering 1940s report, which laid the foundations of the post-War social security system. 'The Childhood Commission' will identify the barriers preventing children from reaching their full potential, propose policy and services solutions and develop targets by which improvements can be monitored. At its heart will be ['The Big Ask'](#) – the largest consultation ever held with children in England.
- **Bus Back Better Strategy** - On 15 March, the Prime Minister unveiled the Government's [new national bus strategy](#) for England, 'Bus Back Better', which outlines reforms of how bus services are planned and delivered backed by £3 billion of investment.

The changes outlined in the strategy include:

- simpler bus fares with daily price caps, so people can use the bus as many times a day as they need without facing mounting costs
- more services in the evenings and at the weekends
- integrated services and ticketing across all transport modes, so people can easily move from bus to train
- all buses to accept contactless payments

The strategy sets out that the Government wants to see operators and local councils enter into statutory 'enhanced partnerships' or franchising agreements to receive the new funding and deliver the improvements.

- **COVID-status certificates** - On 15 March, the Government published a call for evidence seeking views on whether COVID-status certification could play a role in the UK's recovery from the coronavirus outbreak. COVID-19 status certification involves using testing or vaccination data to confirm that a person has a lower risk of transmitting the virus to others. Such certification would be available both to vaccinated people and to unvaccinated people who have been tested. The Government will assess how effective certification would be in reducing risk, and its potential uses in enabling access to settings or relaxing COVID-secure measures.

The review is considering the ethical, equalities, privacy, legal and operational aspects of a possible

certification scheme, and what limits, if any, should be placed on organisations using certification. The consultation is open to all respondents and closes at 11:45pm on 29 March, it can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/covid-status-certification-review-call-for-evidence>

- **Consultation on autumn exam series 2021** - The Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual) announced a two-week consultation on how an autumn exam series for GCSEs, AS and A levels should run this year (2021). Ofqual are keen to hear from students, teachers, exam boards and the wider education sector on the proposals, which include:
 - the autumn series being open to any student who entered or who had intended to enter to take exams this summer
 - holding AS and A level exams in October and GCSE exams in November/early December
 - grades being determined by a student's exam performance only
 - students being able to use the better of the summer or autumn grade

The consultation closes on 9 April 2021 and can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/consultation-on-arrangements-for-an-autumn-2021-exam-series>

Key messages for residents

- **Census Day this Sunday – Reminder** - Households will have received their unique code to allow them to take part in the 2021 Census which is this Sunday 21 March. The census takes place every ten years and is run by the Office for National Statistics.

Every household in the country is asked to take part. It involves completing a questionnaire on different aspects of your household and is used to build an accurate picture of the country's population and its demographic make-up.

The census is a crucial part of gathering the data we, and other local and national organisations and public bodies, use to plan and fund services so it's really important that everyone takes part.

'Census Day' takes place on 21 March and will be 'digital first' this year. [There is lots of guidance and advice about getting support and assistance for completing the census on the ONS website here.](#)

Our library service is providing support on the phone, or with face to face appointments at 17 libraries across the county. To book an appointment with one of our trained Census Support Advisors, residents can phone 01603 774777.

[You can read more about this year's census here.](#)

Please use your networks to publicise the Census.

Public health

- **Thank you to the residents of Diss and Roydon as surge testing ends** - Almost 7,500 Covid 19 tests have been carried out in Diss and Roydon as part of the response to the discovery in the area of a very small number of cases of the Covid 19 variant first identified in South Africa. The surge testing, which began on Friday 19th of February and concluded on Wednesday 3rd of March, saw 7,479 tests carried out, which preliminary results show returned 51 positive results. All those who have tested positive have been instructed to self-isolate.

Testing, which targeted those who live and work in Diss and Roydon aged 16 years or older, was carried out by NHS Test and Trace in three ways:

- 3,613 tests were carried out by Diss and Roydon residents via Home Test Kits
- 3,276 tests were carried out at Mobile Testing Units deployed by the Department for Health and Social Care to the Diss and Roydon area as part of the surge testing
- 590 Diss and Roydon residents were tested during this period via other test centres

Norfolk Public Health estimate that 64.8% of eligible Diss and Roydon residents came forward to be tested over the fortnight of surge testing. These figures are based on operational data.

The surge testing was carried out after a very small number of cases of the Covid 19 variant first

identified in South Africa were detected in the area. Genomic sequencing work is underway to discover if any of the additional positives discovered by the surge testing are related to the new variant.

Anyone with Covid symptoms should self-isolate and book a test online at

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-getting-tested>

- **Symptom-free testing - Symptom-free testing** - Parents/carers, their household and bubbles are now expected to get tested for COVID-19 twice per week. As part of a trial, symptom free testing kits (also known as regular rapid testing or lateral flow testing) are now available for collection from [Dereham Library](#) and [Gorleston Library](#). If this trial is successful, we roll this service out to other libraries across the county in due course.

You can [find out more about the current community collection options in Norfolk](#) on the NCC website.

- **Norfolk participating in new contact tracing scheme** - Norfolk County Council is to oversee all Covid contact tracing in the county, building on the county's successful work to identify close contacts of those who have tested positive for the virus. The "Local-0" scheme will see cases passed without delay to local tracers at the same time as an individual who tested positive for coronavirus is invited to complete the online contact information. The current approach passes cases from the national NHS Test & Trace taskforce onto local tracers only after the national team has been unable to make contact over a period of 24 hours.

The Council's successful bid to be part of the pilot scheme builds on the successful rate of contact tracing seen in the county so far. Following a move to a locally supported model for contact tracing in partnership with local district, borough and the City councils in September, the success rate increased from 81% to 89% by November. This high success rate was a significant factor in Norfolk's inclusion in this pilot scheme.

The Local-0 scheme will lead to an increase in cases being handled by local contact tracers. To handle the anticipated increase, 12 additional contact tracers have been recruited to the Norfolk County Council local team, in addition to the local teams in each of the district, borough and city councils.

Local contact tracers attempt to call individuals who have tested positive for coronavirus. If they are unsuccessful, ground teams in the district, city and borough councils are asked to knock on doors to make contact – the local teams also offer support to help people to isolate. The partnership approach has been critical to Norfolk's success to date.

Education and settings

- **Schools** - Schools continue to welcome back all pupils last week and attendance has extremely positive. Overall attendance was 96.5% in primary schools and due to the phased return of students in secondary schools, to allow for all students to be safely tested, the attendance rate increased throughout and as of 15 March 2021 was 91.5%.
- **Free school meals during the Easter Holidays** - We're ensuring that children eligible for means tested free school meals in Norfolk will continue to get them during the Easter holidays. The one-off funding for the scheme comes from the Department of Work and Pensions' winter hardship support. Schools can order the food vouchers for pupils using an online service and families can receive the codes by email to redeem themselves or as a voucher provided by post, collection or delivery to families without internet access. Some schools may also be offering food parcels, parents and carers should contact their school office to see what they are providing.

[For more information about eligibility and to apply for free school meals, visit the Norfolk County Council website here.](#)

- **Post 16's** - Three young people progressed from NEET into education, employment or training in the last week with 792 young people remaining NEET (4.6%). A further 24 young people have been referred to the new NEET provision at Poultec. The Advisers working with 16 and 17 year olds who are NEET have had more successful interventions with young people, or their families, compared to last year.
- **Big Norfolk Holiday Fun programme launches for families across Norfolk** - Children and young people across Norfolk could be eligible to take part in the new Big Norfolk Holiday Fun programme.

The scheme is being run by Norfolk County Council, in partnership with Active Norfolk and is free to all families with children aged 5-16, who are eligible for means tested free school meals. The scheme will

run throughout this year over Easter, summer and the Christmas holidays, with a remote offer provided for the Easter holidays and more face-to-face activities planned over the summer and Christmas holidays as restrictions allow.

The Big Norfolk Holiday Fun Programme is completely FREE and will give children and young people access to lots of different activities to help keep them busy, active and healthy over the holidays. This Easter families can sign up for activity boxes that include activity equipment, booklets, recipe kits and ingredients and activities will include:

- Live cook along sessions
- Craft and games fun
- Art
- Yoga and fitness
- Mindfulness

Families eligible for the scheme must apply by 15th March to secure a place on the Easter activity scheme. Signing up can be done by:

Visiting <https://www.smartsurvey.co.uk/s/bignorfolkholidayfun>

Text the words "Big Norfolk" to 07553 894233 and a member of the team will call you back (or you can call them direct)

The Big Norfolk Holiday Fun scheme is funded by the Department for Education to offer a holiday activities and food programme for one week during the Easter break, four weeks during the summer break and for one week during the Christmas holidays.

- **Early Years** - We have had 667 settings open this week with 12,367 children attending. Of these 4,327 are children of critical worker, of which 601 are vulnerable. Of those 201 have a social worker and 99 have an EHCP. We have had a number of providers drop out of the workplace testing but this is due to the DfE home testing now being available.

Social care

- **New plan to transform speech and language therapy for Norfolk children** - An ambitious new £3.4 million per year plan to transform speech and language therapy services for children and young people in Norfolk got the go ahead this week after a new countywide contract was agreed. Norfolk County Council and Norfolk and Waveney Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG), which jointly fund and run speech and language therapy, have commissioned Cambridgeshire Community Services (CCS) NHS Trust to provide one single consistent and integrated service across the whole county.

Going live in August, initially as a five-year contract, this will seamlessly replace the existing service, which runs via two different contracts.

Speech and Language Therapy (SaLT) services are for children and young people from birth to 18 with speech, language and communication disorders, delays or dysphagia and up to age 25 for those with an identified need stipulated in their Education Health and Care Plan.

[Read the full story here.](#)

- **Council provides video carephones to help people stay connected** - Norfolk County Council is providing video carephone devices to day centre users in the community, who do not have access to mainstream technology, to help them stay connected as Covid-19 restrictions continue. The pilot is funded by the Norfolk and Waveney Sustainable Transformation Partnership and is being rolled-out together with technology company, Alcove and change consultancy Rethink Partners.

The council is working with day opportunity providers to identify 200 people in Norfolk who are unable to attend face-to-face sessions and to help them participate online.

Residents who receive an Alcove Video Carephone will not only be able to join in on activities virtually but will also have greater contact with their friends and family through video calls, preventing loneliness and isolation. Users are being supported to set up the Alcove Video Carephones and their friends and family members can also be added during set-up. The devices have an embedded SIM Card and users do not need WIFI to use the device.

If you know someone who attends a day centre, who may benefit from a device, please email alcovereferrals@norfolk.gov.uk and we will assess their suitability to receive one.

Business and economy

- **£4.9m CHANCES project to help people across the county from next month** – The Chances scheme will provide specially designed help for people who are not able to access current national support schemes. Depending on the needs of the individual the support could include help to identify skills gaps and finding suitable training and qualifications, support to access services to boost health and wellbeing, or finding ways to overcome any barriers such as transport or accessing childcare. Support could also include providing help to access services for those with physical or learning disabilities, or support from a mental health specialist or disability support specialist who will be working closely with the team.

The Norfolk County Council led Chances for Work and Chances Healthy Living projects are being run by partners Voluntary Norfolk, Norfolk Citizens Advice, Citizens Advice Diss, Thetford and District, and Future Projects. There will be local advocates based in each of the seven Norfolk district areas and these advocates will be working to provide personalised one to one support.

The project which is administered by Norfolk County Council has a total budget of £4.9 million, of which £2.5m is funded by the European Social Fund. The other half of the funding comes from match-funders based in Norfolk including Norfolk County Council, The New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership, and Norfolk's Pooled Business Rates Programme.

Many of the people that the programme will support are likely to be referred by a range of bodies including voluntary, community and social organisations and job centre plus. Individuals who are keen to find out more are also welcome to contact the project team directly – contact details and further information are available at www.norfolk.gov.uk/chances

- **SME Brexit Support Fund opens for applications** - The SME Brexit Support Fund could give you up to £2,000 to help with training or professional advice, if your business has up to 500 employees and no more than £100 million annual turnover. Traders can apply for up to £2,000 in total through two types of grants:

Grant for Training: The grants can be used to provide training on the following:

- How to complete customs declarations
- How to manage customs processes and use customs software and systems
- Specific import and export related aspects including VAT, excise and rules of origin

Grant for Professional Advice: The grant can be used to get professional advice, so your business can meet its customs, excise, import VAT or safety and security declaration requirements.

Find out more information on eligibility for the fund and apply [online](#).

Applications will close on **30 June 2021** or earlier, if all funding is allocated before this date.

General updates

- **Share your views on latest city transport plans**- Consultations on proposals to improve sustainable transport connections in two busy areas of the Norwich network are underway. The Transport for Norwich (TfN) projects at Norwich Train Station and Grapes Hill roundabout are both part of the Transforming Cities funded-programme and are designed to significantly improve bus journey times and reliability, while also providing better facilities for those travelling on foot or by bike. [The full story can be viewed here.](#)

Residents in both of the immediate project areas have been written to with details of the proposals and information on how to share their views. The deadline for comments on both projects is Sunday 28 March 2021. Responses will be carefully considered and the outcomes reported back to the Transforming Cities Fund Joint Committee later in the year.

You can find out more about the proposals and take part in the consultations through the following links. The webpages will be kept up to date with the latest progress and information.

www.norfolk.gov.uk/norwichtrainstation

www.norfolk.gov.uk/grapeshill

