**County Councillor Eric Vardy Report January 2024**

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| **Twenty-seven brand new gritters to join Norfolk’s fleet** |
| **Twenty-seven brand new gritters will be taking to the roads for the first time later this winter in a £3,238,000 boost to the annual push to help keep Norfolk moving safely during the winter months.****The news comes as crews completed their first gritting runs of the season at the weekend, treating routes in the west, inland north and south and east coast areas of the county.****Norfolk’s fleet of 58 winter vehicles treat 2,200 miles of roads on each full 3-hour gritting run. All A and B-class roads and some C-class roads are treated with a focus on commuter and major bus routes and as far as is possible one route into all villages. Our salt domes are fully stocked, crews are ready to go, and our experienced highway team are keeping a close eye on weather sensors and detailed specialist forecasts that that help inform where and when gritting will be taking place.****To help keep people moving around safely this winter, however they choose to travel, we’ll again be providing information and advice on social media with the hashtag #NorfolkWinter.****Find more information on our website here:** [**www.norfolk.gov.uk/winter**](http://www.norfolk.gov.uk/winter) |

SHORT BREAKS FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

Proposals to increase the range of short breaks for children with disabilities and open them up to siblings and other family members are to be discussed by councillors tomorrow.

Norfolk County Council wants to change how it supports children with disabilities, by funding short breaks that best meet children’s needs, are closer to their homes and can support their wider family.

It follows consultation over the summer, which looked at moving from a model that assigns a specific budget to a family, based on a child’s disability, to a new approach that would look at a child’s needs and work with their family to find the right activities to help them flourish.

The budget for short breaks will continue to be £3.5m per year and the council has pledged that children will not have their activities reduced. The approach, which is also used by other local authorities, is much more focused on children’s outcomes and interests, rather than their disability. It also means the council has greater flexibility to buy services for multiple children from some activity providers, meaning that more children could benefit from a break.

The council wants to expand the activities it buys for families, to offer more options and flexibility. This might mean changes in some of the funding parents receive to buy activities directly, but the value of the package of breaks will remain the same, or increase.

Part of the council's strategy is also to support existing activity providers to support children with disabilities, where it is appropriate for the needs of the child, so that they can access fun inclusive activities in their own community alongside their peers.

The proposals and the feedback from public consultation will be discussed by the council’s People and Communities Select Committee when it meets on 17 November.

Cllr Fran Whymark, Chairman of the People and Communities Select Committee, said: “Short breaks provide fun activities for children and respite for their families. We know that they are a real lifeline for families, which is why it’s important that we get any changes to what we are offering right and why we consulted with families who use the service before implementing any changes.

“I welcome any proposal which focuses on looking at what is best for individual children, and their families, and which provides greater choice and more local activities, particularly given the rural nature of Norfolk.”

Norfolk County Council ran a consultation with families between 27 June and 2 August and had more than 200 responses, 43% of people agreed or strongly agreed with e change in the assessment process and 31% disagreed or strongly agreed. The remainder didn’t answer, didn’t agree or disagree, or didn’t know. Eighty-two percent agreed or strongly agreed that activities should be opened up to family members, including siblings.

If agreed, the changes would apply to new children accessing short breaks from April 2024. Other children would move to the new model gradually, as their package comes up for review.

**County Deal for Norfolk update for a directly elected Leader.**

At a full council meeting on 12 December 2023, Councillors accepted a £600 million devolution deal for Norfolk. The deal will also mean that decisions can be taken in Norfolk, for Norfolk.

The council voted to accept a county deal devolution agreement with the Government to transfer significant funding, powers and decisions to Norfolk.

Government funding will start transferring to Norfolk next summer if councillors vote in July 2024 to stage the first election for a leader in May 2025.

The full council agreed the following recommendations:

Council:

• Recognises the work carried out during 2023 to consult with the public, inform Members and prepare plans in relation to the ‘in-principle’ County Deal brought to Council in January this year

• Commends the work undertaken by the Leader and Officers to secure additional benefits for the Norfolk County Deal and resolves that the Deal should be accepted

• Agrees that the election for the Directly Elected Leader should be held alongside the county council elections in May 2025 to enable the widest possible engagement with the electorate

• Agrees that the resolution adopting the new governance arrangements should be brought to the Full Council meeting on 23 July 2024 to facilitate that election date