

Elections May 2026

The Government has proposed to postpone the May 2026 County Council elections to May 2027 to allow time for Councils to implement the new unitary authorities. The number of unitary authorities has yet been announced which we now expect the government to announce the number of unitary authorities in March 2026.

The mayoral election which were set to take place in May 2026, was in November 2025 postponed to May 2028 by the government.

The Order which legally delay the elections for one year, is expected to be laid in parliament shortly. There is a legal challenge (Judicial Review) being heard for two days from 19th February 2026. We expect to hear the result of this legal challenge shortly after.

Adult Social Care Transformation

Norfolk County Council Adult Social Care Department has posted a video outlining the vision and ambition of their Transformation Programme.

The video talks about the vision for Adult Social Care transformation and how communities will play an important role in creating that wrap around support for residents. [Adult Social Care Transformation video](#)

The transformation programme is designed to help residents and communities live their best life well in ways that matter to them. It focuses on preventing issues early, building stronger relationships with people, and connecting them with local support. By working more closely at neighbourhood level, improving how we commission services, and continually learning from what works, we aim to provide more joined-up and responsive support for everyone.

Future of Care Homes

The council launched a review of its care estate last year, as its contract with Norse Care Ltd is due to end in March 2026.

Stow Healthcare, a company that runs good and outstanding care facilities, is interested in buying Norfolk County Council's care company and 20 homes.

If Norfolk County Council agrees a deal with Stow Healthcare, residents of the homes would continue to live there, and existing Norse Care staff would move to the new owner.

Since the contract started in 2011, people's care needs have become more complex and most of the 20 care homes now require modernisation. Three of the homes have closed already but are being included in the proposed sale.

The council's cabinet meets on 26 January to decide whether to agree the "in principle" sale to Stow Healthcare, subject to the details of any sale being agreed with the director of strategic finance in consultation with the leader, deputy leader and the board of Norse Group.

Further details, including a list of the 20 homes, are available in our press release [here](#).

National Updates

Town of Culture competition

The Government [has launched](#) the first ever UK Town of Culture competition, inviting towns across the country to apply to showcase their local culture and identity. The initiative is intended to complement the UK City of Culture programme.

Applications are now open. The strongest bids will progress to a shortlist, with each shortlisted town receiving £60,000 to help deliver their full bids for the competition.

Three finalists - one small, one medium, one large town - will be chosen. The winner will be crowned UK Town of Culture 2028 and receive a £3 million prize. The two runners-up will each receive £250,000 to deliver elements of their bid, from refreshed community infrastructure to electric music festivals.

Applications are open until 31 March 2026 for expressions of interest.

For more information and guidance on how to bid for the UK Town of Culture 2028 title, please go to: [UK Town of Culture 2028 Expression of Interest](#).

Warm Homes Plan

The Government has [announced](#) a £15 billion Warm Homes Plan aimed at providing households with solar panels and green technology to reduce energy bills and triple the number of homes with solar energy. The 'Warm Homes Plan' targets help at low-income families, alongside a universal offer, to ensure that working families can feel the benefits of products that can cut their bills.

Mobile phones and social media

The Government has [announced](#) a 'national conversation' on children's social media use and bans phones in schools to protect young people's wellbeing and ensure safer online experiences. This will look at options including raising the digital age of consent, implementing phone curfews to avoid excessive use, and restricting potentially addictive design features such as 'streaks' and 'infinite scrolling'.

House of Lords backs UK social media ban for under-16s

The House of Lords has supported a move to ban under-16s from social media platforms. By 261 votes to 150, opposition peers voted to support a ban through an amendment to the [Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill](#).

CLLR Michael Dalby

Michael.dalby.cllr@norfolk.gov.uk