

Tell us what you think about our savings proposals

Norwich City Council provides a wide range of services for people who live, work in and visit the city. These include statutory services that we must provide, such as planning, waste collection, recycling, street cleaning and housing.

We also provide a considerable range of discretionary services which include things like parks and open spaces, free public events, economic development, CCTV, sports facilities, community wardens, tourist information, Norwich Community Alarm Service and many more.

But like so many other local authorities we have been hit hard by the effects of the recession.

As recently as last November, the council's finances were looking healthy with more than £10 million in reserves and earning a good level of interest to spend on frontline services. And thanks to sound financial judgement we avoided the pitfalls of investing money in Icelandic banks.

All this meant we were looking forward to the next few years from a position of relative financial stability. But as the recession has deepened we have had to call upon our reserves just to keep services going.

Due to a serious shortfall in money from investments as a result of plummeting interest rates, a drop in income from planning applications and land charges and additional costs associated with concessionary bus fares, we have a budget gap of around £8 million.

Our immediate priority is to close that budget gap and show you how we intend to achieve this.



Services closer to you

As well as looking for financial efficiencies we have also taken this opportunity to look closely at the way we might work in the future. We now want to bring forward plans for how we deliver services in your neighbourhood – work that has been shaped up as part of our bid to become a unitary council. Our ultimate goal with these plans is to bring the services you care about closer to you.

To do this we are proposing to split the city into four areas, north, south, east and west. Each new neighbourhood area will have a dedicated team, led by an area manager, who will be responsible for making sure services in that area are delivered in the best possible way. Each neighbourhood team will work with local people to understand how to make services in their area better, more locally focussed, responsive and visible to them on the ground.

This means we can focus available resources on the things you tell us you value most and at the same time save money and become more efficient.

How we are proposing to close the budget gap

Our key priority is to identify £6.3 million of this sum by April 2010, with the remaining £1.7 million to be found in 2010-11. So far we have earmarked £5.7 million of this amount from cost savings and efficiencies which will have no impact on frontline services. The main savings areas are:

- **£3.1 million from contracts** – it is through contracts with suppliers that the council provides some of its key services, such as repairing properties and collecting waste and recycling. This year we have been fortunate as some of our major contracts have been up for renewal or renegotiation, and we have secured some very competitive prices to help with the savings target.
- **£2.6 million by reducing overheads and staff costs** – we have severely reduced our spending on things like stationery, agency staff, overtime, postage and office accommodation. We have also carried out a jobs review across the council and are proposing to reduce the number of occupied posts by 45 and a further 30 vacancies which are currently frozen would not be filled.

However, this leaves approximately £600,000 to be found by April 2010 and means we will need to consider how we provide some of our discretionary services.

Some of the options being considered are:

- Encouraging customers to use alternative methods of paying bills (ie online or at the Post Office), removing the need for a cashiers service at City Hall: **£150,000**.
- A detailed review of any underused sports facilities at our parks, such as bowling, and putting greens and tennis courts. For more information on this, go to www.norwich.gov.uk/savingsproposals: **£100,000**.
- Reviewing all services for which we currently charge (this would involve removing some charges that cost us more to collect than we earn and increasing others): **£100,000**.
- Reassessing direct provision of some operational services, and providing a signposting service to alternative providers (eg pest control): **£83,000**.
- Reviewing the amount of some grants we provide to voluntary organisations: **£76,000**.
- Reducing the amount of time the council sports development team spends working with sports clubs and societies: **£30,000**.
- Shortening daily opening times at the Tourist Information Centre and only opening on peak Sundays and bank holidays: **£17,000**.
- Reviewing the activities within the Lord Mayor's Celebration: **£10,000**.



Putting our house in order

After a lot of hard work to turn our finances around, the Audit Commission has confirmed our accounts are in order and given our financial systems a clean bill of health. Our planning service has also improved significantly and housing service improvements are on target too.



Our priorities up to 2012

Although there are some signs the worst of the recession is over, we are also conscious that money will remain tight. This means we might have to consider making further savings in the future.

We have therefore started to think about our longer term priorities so that if the financial situation recovers more slowly we will know where to focus our resources. We have also used residents feedback gathered through a number of consultations to help us with this.

We will continue to prioritise frontline services for local people. Alongside this we have already started to identify several important areas which will help us to build up a picture of what our key priorities could be from 2010-2012. These include:

- changing the way the council works to make it more cost effective
- keeping the place where you live clean
- keeping the place where you live safe and healthy
- helping people to weather the effects of the recession
- targeting our resources on those most in need.

Your city
your say

Your views count

We want to know what you think about what we have done so far and our proposed priorities up to 2012. We know we cannot please everyone all of the time, but we do want to listen so that we can take as many views into account as possible. **Click here** to complete the online questionnaire.

Please send us your views by:

- emailing yourcityyoursay@norwich.gov.uk
- writing to: Transformation, City Hall, St Peters Street, Norwich NR2 1NH
- handing in your comments at any city council office
- completing an online form at www.norwich.gov.uk
- talking to your local councillor (contact details are on the website).

