

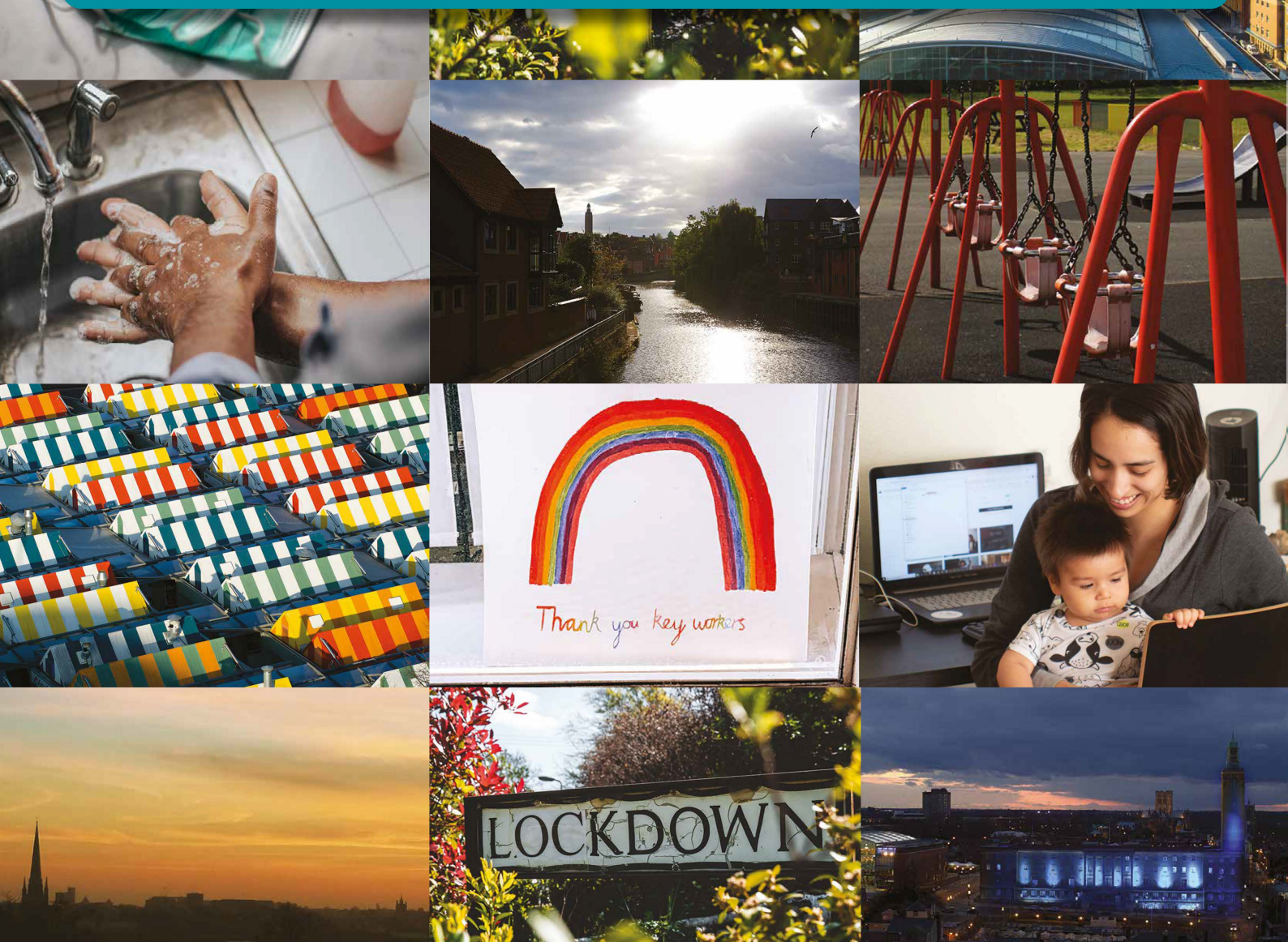
NORWICH

# CITIZEN

**Covid-19 special edition**



**NORWICH**  
City Council



**When the country went into lockdown in March our whole way of life changed beyond recognition.**

Like so many other organisations employing key workers, the city council went into emergency mode. We worked round-the-clock to support the most vulnerable in our communities and to ensure vital services were available to our residents and businesses.

This Covid-19 special issue charts our response to the pandemic and paves the way ahead as the council and the city moves into recovery.



### Message from the leader, Alan Waters

Covid-19 has affected the lives of everyone in this city. We have learnt things about ourselves and we have learnt about the lives of others.

The city council has responded to the crisis by redesigning its services and priorities to meet the needs of a city in quarantine, in particular its most vulnerable residents.

It's the story of people, across Norwich, despite the strains and stresses, staying at home to contain the spread of the virus and of the wide network of partnerships and many hundreds of volunteers that have worked together to support their fellow citizens.

Now, thoughts have turned to how we recover from the impact of Covid-19. We are going to have to live with uncertainty – that is inevitable. But a shock like this gives us an opportunity to think about how we want to move forward positively.

Our ambition should be that we work together to make Norwich, after the pandemic, a better place for all its residents.



@NorwichCC



Norwich City Council



Norwich City Council

# Our response to Covid-19

## In numbers

**682**   
**food parcels**  
delivered

**528**  
**prescriptions**   
delivered

**6,000**  
**calls**  
made to shielding  
residents 

**500**  
**Norwich**  
**volunteers**  
signed up to help at our  
Norwich Community  
Response hub

**£36.5m**  
**awarded**  
in grant payments to  
local businesses

**3,700**  
residents had their  
**council tax**  
**reduced to zero**

**2,800**  
**local businesses**  
given relief grants

 **1.7m**  
**bins collected**

 **100**  
**rough sleepers**  
provided with emergency  
accommodation

**160,000**  
**views**  
of our coronavirus  
web pages 



## In focus

**Identifying and supporting those at most risk** of coronavirus was the key goal of the Norwich Community Response Hub, which we got up and running in just one week. Run by local volunteers and council staff, seven days a week, we made hundreds of food and prescription deliveries as well as made thousands of phone calls to people most in need.

Local councils were asked to administer the government's business grants. We **designed a new claims scheme from scratch**, paying out over £36.5m in grants to local businesses by the end of May – putting us in the top 10 per cent of councils nationally who administer the grants, and the highest performing council in Norfolk based on the percentage paid out. As we write, we're in the

process of paying out up to an additional £2m to businesses who fell outside of the original criteria for grants.

**To support our residents facing financial hardship**, we made a decision early on to use the government hardship fund to reduce council tax bills to zero for both working and pension age residents claiming council tax benefit. We've also offered flexible payment options for council tax and social housing rent, and supported a local food bank through an emergency grant.

Working with Pathways Norwich, we **acted on the government's urgent request to house all rough sleepers**. Norwich, like other cities, saw a big rise in the number of people requiring emergency accommodation during the pandemic. The vast majority of those housed have

now been supported into more settled housing – a central aspect to all our Pathways work.

Thanks to the huge effort of our staff, many of whom were redeployed, and the dedication of our contractors, we've **continued to deliver our core services**, such as bin collections and planning. We've been mindful of the changing needs of residents and adapted quickly, for example by providing free parking for key workers and communicating in different ways.

We've **worked in partnership** across the county and city to protect people at most risk during the pandemic, such as those in danger of domestic abuse during lockdown. Local community groups and residents have also played a key role in keeping people safe and well – and we've helped them set up and organize where needed.




We made our beautiful parks and open spaces safe so they gave our residents a peaceful escape.



Our bin collections continued throughout thanks to the dedication of the crews.



Some of our sheltered housing residents received food parcels from Norwich City Football Club Foundation. Our housing team has been in touch with residents by phone every week.



The Norwich Community Response Hub was established to coordinate all of our work supporting the community during Covid-19. It was only possible thanks to local volunteers and council staff.

# Our council and our city: moving into recovery

As one of the UK's 400 or so post-Covid councils counting the cost of the pandemic – on every level – we're carefully planning our next steps.

**M**oving into recovery takes us all into uncharted waters, and with opinion never so divided on what may lie ahead. Will we see changes in state investment? Will we continue to value key workers? Have our social values changed? Are we facing a decade of deepening austerity?

These are just a few of the issues being carefully worked through as we reshape the council and

assess the services we provide as well as how we provide them. We also have an essential role to play in leading the city into recovery, and beyond, by working with partners involved in the '2040 Norwich City Vision' project which was established in 2018 to set out a shared vision for the city.

For a number of years the city council has set out and followed its corporate plan – a document which outlines its strategy and

priorities. Along with this, the council has been working to a number of themes detailed in the 2040 vision document. While these remain important documents and aspirations, the fallout of the pandemic has made us rethink our steps over the next 12 months or so.

This has resulted in the publication of our 'Covid-19: blueprint for recovery' – a framework endorsed by the council's cabinet in June. It sets

## The council's eight themes, and some key actions, as set out in its recovery plan

### Securing the council's finances

- lobby government to fully compensate the council for the financial impacts of Covid-19
- reduce non-essential spending

### Modernising the council; reimagining local services

- take forward an organisation-wide review of service delivery to look at reimagining how services are delivered in future

- develop a digital strategy to look at how technology can enable the council to change

### Supporting the most vulnerable

- continue to work with partners to develop a sustainable approach to tackling homelessness in the city
- carry on supporting victims of domestic abuse

### Business and the local economy

- work with City Fibre to deliver a full fibre network across Norwich to improve digital connectivity
- develop and deliver a town investment plan to get access to £25m of funding for investment in the city.





# COVID-19 recovery plan

out eight new themes (see below) which the council will work to during recovery, along with short and longer term actions linked to each theme. The themes are: arts, culture and heritage; business and the local economy; climate change and the green economy; harnessing social capital; housing, regeneration and development; modernising the council; reimagining local services; securing the council's finances; supporting the most vulnerable.

Alan Waters, leader of the city council said: "Norwich stood firmly and in solidarity against the threat posed by the pandemic. We will need to call on all that resolve and unity as we move deeper into the recovery phase and assess the full impacts of Covid-19 on our finances and what that means for the services we provide.

"We will continue to press government to provide sufficient funding to the city council as it was made abundantly clear

throughout the crisis of the crucial role this council played to support residents, businesses and some of the most vulnerable in our communities."

At the time of going to print, a strategy was being drawn up to orchestrate how we will engage with our key partners, residents and businesses on the work outlined in the recovery report to help steer the city through the challenges and opportunities ahead.

## Housing, regeneration and development

- bring forward a plan to redevelop the former depot site at Mile Cross, which has the potential to create 200 new council homes
- begin the master planning process to regenerate east Norwich with the potential to create 4,000 new homes and 6,000 new jobs

## Arts, culture and heritage

- work with the arts, heritage and culture sector to enable the city's institutions and events to reopen in a safe way
- at the appropriate time, work to deliver council run events, in line with social distancing requirements

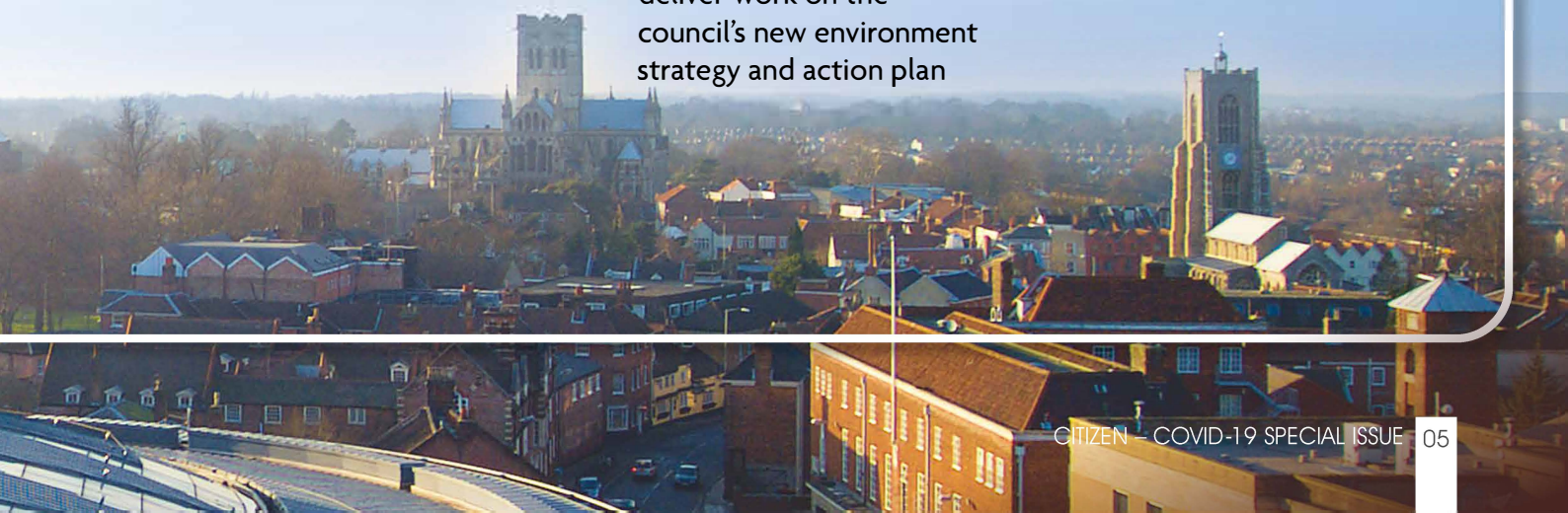
## Climate change and the green economy

- deliver work on the council's new environment strategy and action plan

- promote sustainable travel in the city, building on the well advanced measures already in place.

## Harnessing social capital

- work with community groups and volunteers to improve local neighbourhoods
- create two-way conversations with communities to inform decision-making



# A 20/20 vision for Norwich 2040

## norwich 2040 city vision

In the wake of the pandemic our Norwich 2040 City Vision programme has never been so vital. By working with our partners we will set out our collective approach to the city's recovery.

The **Norwich 2040 City Vision**, launched in 2018, reflects the ambitions of the whole city, its people, businesses and institutions. The document set out five themes which form the foundation of a shared vision for the city – creative, fair, liveable, connected, dynamic.

At the end of May, discussions with vision partners – drawn from business, charity, education and public bodies – began to focus on plans for recovery after each shared their valuable experiences on the pandemic.

The clear consensus was that each of the vision themes have never been so relevant, nor has the need for everyone to work together to make Norwich the city it wants to be in 2040.

Key areas that feature in the city-wide recovery plans include:

- making sure people feel confident and safe to return to the city, visiting its high streets and public spaces
- adapting to the impacts in the city centre and communities as people continue to work from home, with the absence of cultural and leisure activities, and the increase in online shopping and virtual socialising
- addressing the digital divide and other inequalities highlighted or made worse by the pandemic
- recognising the importance that culture can play in recovery, despite participation and attendance restrictions
- ensuring sustainable transport and active travel into and around the city
- use of existing assets and strong local sectors, for example, our digital and tech sector
- the need to engage widely with groups and stakeholders across the city.

Alan Waters, leader of the city council said:

**“Together we can build a better, stronger and fairer Norwich for all who live, work, study and visit here. This is important for the economic success of the city, its culture and heritage, future opportunities for our young people, as well as the health and wellbeing of those who live here, and the environment we live in.”**

As part of our **City of Stories**, over the coming months, the vision partners want to hear from residents and local groups about their experiences during the pandemic to understand what's happening and what matters to communities in our city.

In the longer term, we want to continue these local conversations to truly put people at the heart of decisions being made that affect them.

For information on how you can tell your story email [norwich2040@norwich.gov.uk](mailto:norwich2040@norwich.gov.uk)



# Securing the council's finances



It's no secret that delivering council services – providing social housing and benefits, maintaining parks and open spaces, even collecting waste and recycling – is expensive.

The money we use to run these services comes from a variety of sources, including receiving a portion of council tax and business rates, income from fees and charges; and in more recent years, investing in commercial property, which provides important rental income.

This income, combined with prudent financial planning, has meant we've been able to balance our budget in recent years, despite year-on-year government cuts.

However, the cost of meeting the needs created by the coronavirus pandemic has had, and will continue to have, a considerable impact on our finances.

Not only have there been additional costs – such as providing food and medicine packages to the vulnerable in

the city and investing in IT to enable staff to work from home – but our usual income streams have been affected. Commercial rents, car park charges, planning and licensing fees, event and facility bookings are all down.

To date, we've been awarded £1.5m of Covid-19 funding from government. But we estimate that the cost across our budgets could reach as much as £14m over the next few years. Even if we used our available reserves to help, there will still be a budget shortfall.

## So what do we need to do to make sure we can continue to deliver vital services that people rely on?

The coming weeks and months will be challenging but we have committed in our Covid-19 recovery plan to:

- lobby government to make sure we receive fairer funding
- review our budgets:
  - to see if we can make any extra reductions in day-to-

day running and maintenance costs (revenue budget)

- to make sure commitments we have made from our capital budget – which tend to be one-off spends on new buildings or improving existing ones – are still a priority and affordable
- update our medium-term financial strategy to see what we need by way of savings and what options we have for using reserves
- start work on next year's (2021-2022) budgets.

We will also continue to innovate, as well as explore opportunities for external investment and funding. We're currently working with a range of partners to deliver against an ambitious vision for the future the city has committed to achieving together. Through the Norwich Town Deals Board, chaired by Andrew Dornie of Aviva, we are looking to make an application, which, if successful, would secure up to £25m for growth in the city.

**If you have concerns about paying your rent or council tax, or you are struggling during this difficult time, please do get in touch with us.**

## Support and advice

### Norfolk Citizens Advice

Broad range of advice including debt, benefit checks, housing, employment  
[www.ncab.org.uk](http://www.ncab.org.uk) and click 'email advice'. • T: 03444 111444

# THANK YOU NORWICH!

You have been responsible and made huge personal sacrifices during this really challenging time.

In turn, we have done our best to support you while you have been supporting others.



For the latest advice and guidance, visit:  
**[www.norwich.gov.uk/coronavirus](http://www.norwich.gov.uk/coronavirus)**  
**[www.gov.uk/coronavirus](http://www.gov.uk/coronavirus)**