

DISTRICT COUNCIL REPORT FOR EDGEFIELD PC – JANUARY 2026

**** I wish everyone a healthy and prosperous New Year ****

1. LOCAL GOVERNMENT REFORM UPDATE (LGR)

Such is the disdain by Government for the sanctity of local democracy, there is still no certainty that County Council elections will happen for the second-year running. Because the County Council decided in 2024 to proceed with the new unitary councils, the planned elections for county council seats were postponed in May last year. There are those cynical enough to suggest that Government is running scared of the results predicted by the opinion polls but I couldn't possibly comment!

Just when we were beginning to think the new mayoral elections would definitely be happening this May, the Government surprised all of us by announcing recently that those elections will not happen for another two years.

2. LOCAL PLAN 2024-40 ADOPTED

The Council voted to adopt its new Local Plan after the Government Planning Inspectorate approved the content after 18 months or so. As the Cabinet member responsible for seeing it through a ten-year process, I am delighted we now have a new plan for development across the district. It will enable the Council to limit the extent of new housing over the next 14 years and help us to avoid speculative building.

3. HUNWORTH HUNNY BELL

After 18 months of this being submitted to planners, we are making some real progress towards a decision soon. A revised scheme sees the number of dwellings reduced from 10 to 6 and arrangements to link proceeds from new house sales for re-furbishing the pub amended to include 4 rooms for overnight accommodation. It is expected to be decided at the Development Committee next month.

4. RENTERS RIGHTS REFORM

Faced with the new legislation and financial impacts for providing a service, we are evaluating what the new legislation will mean for advising tenants about the new rights to secure their tenancies. We anticipate our housing team will receive more enquiries about the changes and effects on future housing delivery types. We intend to publish information on the Council's website for frequently asked questions.

5. NATIONAL PLANNING REFORMS

A big shake-up for planning authorities became law on 18 December. The Planning and Infrastructure Act (PIA) will allow a so-called national scheme of delegation to reduce the number of cases being decided by planning committees thus increasing decisions

taken by officers. It's part of the drive by government to build 1.5 million homes by speeding up the planning process. If an applicant satisfies the Council's new Local Plan policies, then it is unlikely to go before a committee for scrutiny and most objections will be dismissed from public, parish and town councils as well as consultees (unless there is good grounds for referring to them). A new dawn of sorts for our award-winning planning services.

6. BUS SERVICES REVIEW

Government have launched a re-organization of local bus services (via the Confederation of Passenger Transport) to transfer services from private operators over the last 40 years who predictably focused on profitable routes at the expense of local communities. Government is investing £1 billion pounds in this financial year to support services across the country. So far major urban areas and cities have been the beneficiaries of faster and more reliable journeys to education and employment destinations. To support this change £24 billion over the next 4 years will be spent on improving motorways (not here of course!) and local roads. It will mean that Councils will have the flexibility to choose between bus franchises, partnerships or Council bus companies – like the good old days.

7. LOCAL GOVT FINANCE SETTLEMENT 2026-7

Recently published by MHCLG (Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government) is the annual provisional settlement consultation and under the proposals the (now legendary) funding gap between rural and urban areas, estimated to be some 40%, is set to widen in 2026-7. And unfortunately will continue to widen over the next 3 years. This will mean that pressure to maximise council tax increases will persist for some time. This represents a further u-turn by Government on the proposal set out in December 2024. Urban councils will receive 41% more per head in Government Funded Spending power than most rural councils like ours in 2026-27. The clear need for the addition of explicit rural weighing into the core formula to reflect the higher costs of service delivery in rural areas has been ignored yet again. More people live in rural England than in Greater London.

8. GOODBYE RIGHT TO BUY

Following the recent abolition in Scotland and Wales of sales of council housing to tenants, will Westminster follow suit for council tenants in England? Well, it seems not just yet but it is going to be more difficult to qualify under new tighter restrictions. Any new council houses will have to remain tenanted for the first 35 years, then tenants will have to occupy them for 5 years, instead of the current 3, and the discount against the market value is going to be reduced to a percentage yet to be announced under proposed legislation. Such is the drop in numbers of sales that proceeds are insufficient in themselves to generate money for housing associations to buy them or build

replacements with some 18,000 homes on the waiting list nationally which results in too many people being on the housing waiting lists for too long. The outcry for affordable and social rented property shows no sign of relenting.

9. NATIONAL PLANNING POLICY FRAMEWORK 2025 (NPPF)

The Government have launched yet another consultation on a draft NPPF setting out new powers for deciding planning applications last month just before Christmas. It is the second version since the Government came to power in 2024. It proposes to remove the right to decide on small developments from planning committees like ours along with automatic permissions for building close to railway stations and promotes building upwards in towns. Powers for local councils to buy land to connect infrastructure and to speed up building on sites with existing permissions, expected to be in the draft, were missing. The consultation closes on 10 March.

10. SPECIAL EDUCATION NEEDS AND DISABILITIES (SEND)

There will be more specialist calm learning spaces in mainstream schools to support our children with such characteristics announced by the Government. Its proposed 10,000 free special places nationally will be made available through new schools or if not, by giving councils funding to create equivalent provision. We will see how this impacts our part of Norfolk when the County Council get to grips with it. Let's hope they make a better job of it than they have building the new school in Holt, not started since it received permission 6 years ago!

Please get in touch regarding anything in this report or any other queries about NNDC services and I will do my best to help you.

Thank you for taking time to read this report.

Cllr Andrew Brown

18/1/26