



COUNTY SPOTLIGHT

Every day services

The vital and unsung services that impact our daily lives



About County Spotlight

At the County Councils Network (CCN) one of our core objectives as a national representative body is to share the innovative work our councils are doing on a daily basis to provide vital frontline services, support local economies, and create thriving communities.

This regular publication seeks to shine the spotlight on the most recent best practice and innovative solutions being put forward by our member councils across a range of different policy areas. Alongside this, it provides an update on the national policy landscape and commentary from our lead members and strategic partners.

To find out more about future themes, or to recommend a case study, please contact ian.burbidge@local.gov.uk.

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CCN View



Whilst the biggest and most under-pressure local government services such as adult social care, Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) provision and children's services will always get the most airtime, it is sometimes easy to forget that county councils and unitary authorities can deliver over 800 different local services.

You only have to look at a council's website to see the length and breadth of services we offer to 26m county residents; ones that make a tangible difference to their lives. Some of these may be used few and far between, but at important life milestones such as birth registrations, others might be used each and every day.

Take, for example, your daily commute to and from work. Invariably you'd be travelling on paths or roads maintained by your upper-tier council, on public transport subsidised by the local authority, and with council-operated streetlights illuminating your way. Moreover, think of how you recycle your waste, how much you visit your local park, or the measures out in place to help your child get to school safely.

It is easy to take all of these for granted - but all them are provided by CCN member councils.

Of course, we know that council budgets are increasingly becoming squeezed with local authorities having to spend a larger percentage on the services where they have a statutory duty to deliver. But despite these pressures there is a great deal of work going into improving vital everyday services.

It is these types of service that this *County Spotlight* champions, which play a vital role in your life.

We know public spending will be tight this Parliament. The CCN will be leading the case for sustainable and long-term funding for councils, one which enables us to not only continue providing these vital services, but improve and enhance them.

Cllr Tim Oliver
CCN Chairman

The services the County Councils Network's (CCN) 37 members touch on the daily lives of the 26 million residents they serve. Within the LGA estimate that local government delivers around 800¹ different services to their local residents.

This County Spotlight aims to champion these (sometimes) unsung services delivered across four broad themes: recycling, waste and bin collections; keeping county residents moving; streetlights, parks and tidy counties; supporting county families and the next generation of learners.

Within these themes there are large-scale projects such as rolling out an entirely new waste collection service across a whole county or gritting the equivalent of over 80,000 miles: endeavours that will impact on the lives of virtually every single person living in that county.

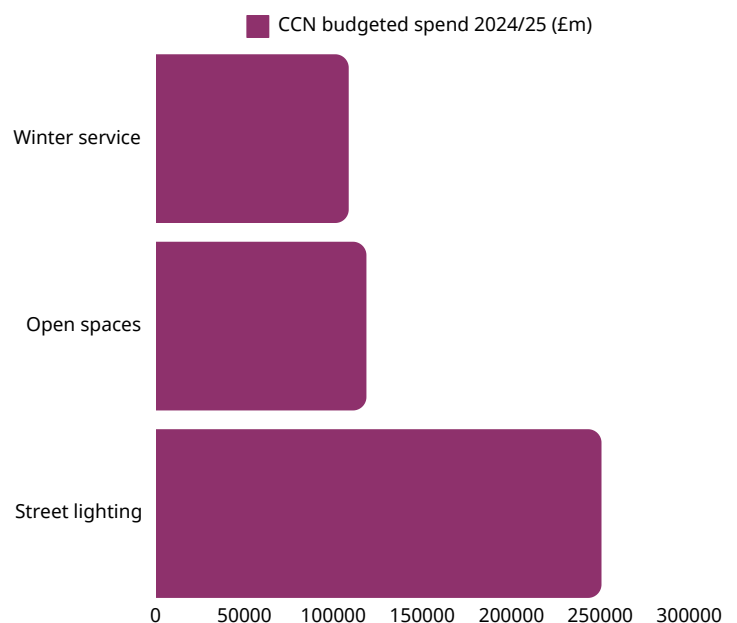
But each category also highlights other projects which are smaller in scale but will be of significant value to certain local people such as stepping in to save an under-threat bus route serving a local community or installing disabled facilities in toilets within a country park.

Within these these themes, we seek to highlight good practice and successful transformation projects in a climate of financial pressure on local government.

Across the areas of focus in this document, waste is the largest expenditure.

But while councils have faced financial pressures, it is important to recognise these service areas remain significant parts of an upper-tier councils' expenditure. The CCN's member councils are budgeted to spend £250m on street lights in 2024-25, £108m on winter services, and £118m on open spaces, including parks.

Figure 1: CCN members' budgeted spend on winter services, open spaces and streetlights in 2024/25



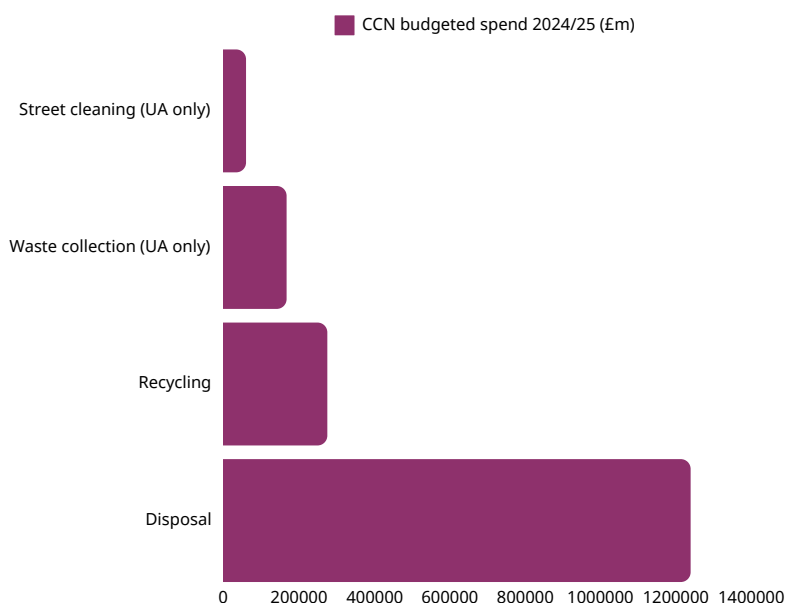
CCN members are budgeted to spend £1.7bn across this service area this year, with the majority of allocated on disposal. In total, £275m is budgeted for recycling, and CCN unitary councils are budgeting £166m for waste collection.

1. <https://www.local.gov.uk/about/what-local-government>

It is in waste that local residents are likely to see a number of changes over the next few years, with the previous government mandating reforms in a bid to increase recycling rates, including mandatory weekly food waste collections and fortnightly residual waste collections. Councils must introduce this by April 2026, and as this County Spotlight shows many of CCN's unitary councils and county councils (working with their district council partners) have begun rolling out these changes.

These will be the most intensive and complex to roll out in England, owing to the large geographies of county areas. The government has allocated £300m² towards the reforms, but county councils (as disposal authorities) have not been given any funding despite needing to improve infrastructure to cater for extra food waste. Therefore, this figure should be reviewed by the new government, including specific funding for county councils.

Figure 2: CCN members' budgeted spend on street cleaning and waste in 2024/25



Within this area, a new tax to be introduced on the carbon emitted from burning waste currently proposes that councils who incinerate waste should be taxed, rather than the industries that create fossil-based materials in the first place.

The Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS) is a system that puts a market price on carbon emissions. It currently applies to the aviation industry, and the last Government proposed to expand it to the incineration of waste from 2028. The CCN recently published a new analysis with the LGA and the District Councils Network, which showed this could cost councils £1.1bn by 2036.³

Public transport is another significant expenditure for CCN members, and a vital (and sometimes lifeline) everyday service for residents. The network's authorities have budgeted £240m in subsidies to operators in 2024-25 and a further £241m in providing concessionary fares. Despite this, CCN research has warned that local bus services are in a state of 'managed decline' with passenger numbers at historic lows and councils in county areas facing a £420m shortfall in their transport budgets.⁴

The previous government's National Bus Strategy provided £1.1bn to improve and modernise services, but two-thirds of this money went to urban areas where evidence shows services are already more comprehensive. With a new government now in place, CCN's Manifesto for Counties calls on ministers⁵

2. . UK Government: [New £295m for councils to introduce weekly food waste collections](#) (March 2024)

3. CCN: [Misfiring incineration tax could help billions of unfunded costs onto councils](#) (September 2024)

4. CCN: [Rural bus services at a historic low as new report reveals urban locations received two-thirds of government funding](#), (July 2023)

5. CCN: [Manifesto for Counties: Housing, Infrastructure and Transport](#)

to commit to a long-term revenue stream for bus services in next year’s Spending Review; moving away from competitive bidding and allocating resource based on need.

The recently-launched Bus Centre for Excellence⁵ should also work with CCN’s member councils on a dedicated ‘county bus service support package’ that recognises the specific challenges in delivering these types of service in county area, using this to inform a bespoke ‘county bus strategy’.

Whilst councils’ role in the education system has been reduced over recent times, local authorities have evolved their role and retain a number of important duties in supporting pupils and parents, as this report highlights.

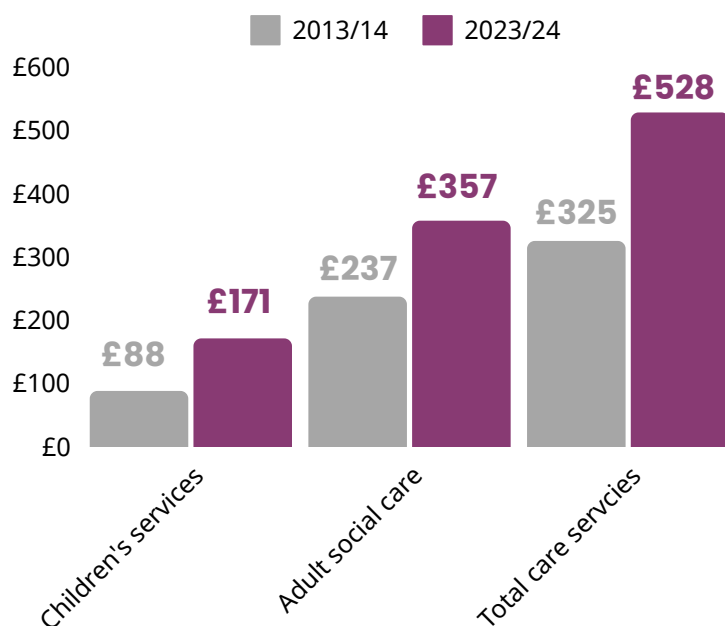
With a new team in place at the Department for Education, now is a good time to review how equipped councils are fulfil their duties in school place planning, school attendance, and supporting schools in improvement. Councils should be given more powers to direct academies on issues that affect whole local education systems, such as in-year admissions, SEND provision, and school expansion. In a nutshell, the new government should enhance powers and role of councils in their local education systems.

Counties have seen their populations grow by over 560,000 people over the last decade to 25.4m residents, driving up demand for the everyday services highlighted in this publication, from school crossing patrols, to parks, and from waste collection to gritting.

As we look ahead to the next five years of the new Parliament, public finances are likely to remain tight. Even before the new government outlined a bleaker-than-forecast picture of the country’s public finances, departments such as the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government were projected to receive a real-terms funding reduction over the coming years.

If this happens, the amount of money councils can spend on everyday services will be squeezed. Earlier this year, the CCN’s research⁶ showed how its members’ budgets were increasingly being consumed by adult social care and children’s services. County and unitary councils are spending £200 more per-person on these two care services compared to a decade ago, with those two services now accounting for two thirds (65%) of their average budgets, up from 57% in 2014.

Figure 3: CCN members’ per person spend on children’s services and adult social care over the last decade



5: Chartered Institution of Highways and Transport: [Bus Centre of Excellence launched](#) (March 2023)

6. CCN: [New data reveals local authorities spend two-thirds of their budgets on care services](#) (March 2024)

Alongside this, government grant funding has largely been focussed on these two services, as well as revenue-raising policies such as the social care precept.

This is despite the costs of everyday services rising over the last few years due to inflation, with these increased costs now 'baked in' to councils' budgets. This leaves councils with less resource in real-terms to fund them, with central government resource in these areas focussed on capital investment, such as the waste reforms or the Bus Service Improvement Grant.

The CCN will soon be releasing new research which will show how spending need in the most demand-intensive services will rise by 2030, and what reforms will be needed to address these costs.

If reform is successful over the course of this Parliament and costs in the likes of children's services and SEND are better contained, then local authorities will have more resource freed up to not only protect expenditure on every day services, but to invest in them.

The CCN will be making this case to the new government ahead of the October Budget and in the 2025 Spending Review.



Theme 1:

Improving recycling, reducing waste and collecting bins

If you ask a resident what the most important local government service is to them, the chances are they will say bin collections.

Important as they are, curb-side collections only scratch the surface of councils' responsibility for waste, disposal and recycling. Over the last few years, we have seen successive governments pledge net-zero targets. To achieve these, increased recycling rates and reducing food waste will be important.

The CCN's member councils have worked hard to improve recycling rates, including successful behavioural change campaigns to encourage people to recycle more. They have also embraced novel ideas such as opening up shops in household waste recycling centres, selling reusable items. Others have moved to booking systems for their recycling centres to make visits simpler.

With the Environment Act 2021 mandating that food waste should be collected every week by 2026, the CCN's 17 unitary councils are currently rolling out major changes to their collection and recycling service which are aimed at improving recycling. These are large and complex schemes, with CCN's members clearly communicating to residents about the changes. As this section shows, this is already yielding results with recycling rates improving and others seeing a marked improvement in a reduction in food waste following clear and targeted campaigns.

Other CCN members who are county councils are working alongside district partners to help ensure the rollout is seamlessly done via communications and campaigns, whilst others are taking advantage of the new arrangements in new ways – including converting waste to electricity.



Cornwall Council

Major new recycling and waste service yields results

A major new household refuse collection service in Cornwall is already improving recycling rates and cutting waste. The changes will cut Cornwall's annual carbon emissions by nearly 18,000 tonnes of CO₂: equivalent to the amount of that a car would emit driving round the world 2,500 times.

Cornwall Council's new service enables food waste to be collected every week, with recycling and refuse collected every fortnight. The volume of wheelie bins will be reduced to encourage people to recycle more and the council is implementing a comprehensive communications plan, including community roadshows, to ensure residents are prepared for the changes.

Given the geographic spread of Cornwall's 280,00 homes, the new service is being phased. Within two months of the rollout in the first area, the council collected 800 tonnes of food waste and the proportion of recycling increased from 40% of all waste collected to 55%.

[Read more here](#)

Dorset Council

Unitary council has fifth best recycling rate in England

Dorset Council had the fifth best recycling rate in England last year: 59.1%.

The council said that its Recycle for Dorset kerbside collection scheme is a huge success for the county, which was introduced between 2012 and 2015. The scheme saves £3.3m per year compared to the previous scheme. Since then, the unitary council has continuously introduced improvement projects, behavioural change campaigns and practical 'on the ground' solutions to further drive up performance.

These include regular communications ranging from recycling guides which are sent to around 60,000 Dorset properties, 22 roadshows which reached over 1,200 residents, as well as bespoke campaigns for food waste and littering. The latter saw the council amongst the first local authorities country to set up a system whereby residents can send in the dashcam footage showing litter being thrown out of a vehicles. Using the footage, the council can subsequently find the vehicle owners and fine them.

[Read more here](#)

Hertfordshire County Council

Collaborative campaign to reduce food waste

The equivalent of 66 million meals are thrown away in Hertfordshire every year- and the Hertfordshire Waste Partnership (HWP) has responded with an ambitious multi-council campaign to encourage residents to reduce waste.

With research showing that up to 65% of food thrown away in the county could have been eaten, HWP has created the #worthsaving campaign across traditional media and local authorities' newsletter channels. The partnership between Hertfordshire County Council and the ten district and borough councils in the county included a trial of the campaign last year, for six months, in three of its areas – resulting in residents reducing food waste by 15%.

The HWP's four step plan highlights how tweaking existing habits in small ways, such as sticking to shopping lists, eating leftovers and freezing excess food, could cut down on waste. Estimates suggesting that reducing food waste could cut greenhouse gas emissions globally by 10%.

[Read more here](#)

Lancashire County Council

Revolutionising food waste: from scraps to electricity

In 2026, food waste will be collected weekly as part of government reforms. In Lancashire, district councils will collect this waste which will be deposited at a waste recycling plant operated by Lancashire County Council.

The county council will then convert this waste collected by district councils into electricity at its Farington Waste Recovery Park. With the site able to process up to 40,000 tonnes of food waste a year, the electricity generated could save over £2.5m and help power the plant. In addition, a further £3.5m will be saved from the reduced cost of processing waste compare to current methods.

With district councils in Lancashire rolling out food caddies to residents, kitchen and food scraps will be collected using specially designed vehicles. These will be deposited in an enclosed area of the waste park and packaging and contamination will be removed using high-tech equipment. The resulting sludge will be then held in an airtight tank where it is broken down and produces a biogas, which can be used to generate electricity.

[Read more here](#)

Derbyshire County Council

Cutting down on waste by reselling recycled items

Derbyshire County Council is taking used items brought by residents to its recycling centres and setting them aside for re-sale: cutting down on waste and generating income for the facility.

The county council's re-use shop has opened up at its household waste recycling centre in Bolsover, which is stocked with items salvaged from eight of its recycling centres such as furniture, crockery, books and garden appliances.

The council's share of any profits from the initiative will be put back into its waste management budget, meaning the shop could contribute to the running of household waste recycling centres in Derbyshire: helping the service become more self-sufficient. The shop was opened in March this year and if it proves popular the council will consider opening up more across the county.

[Read more here](#)

West Sussex County Council

Nine in ten rate recycling centre booking system as good

West Sussex County Council has rolled out a bookings system at all of its recycling centres to avoid queues – and 96% of residents rated the system excellent or good.

The county council's Book to Recycle system has been rolled out to all of the area's household waste recycling centres this year, having been in place in many since 2021. The system enables more staff time to offer advice and divert more items to recycling, and gives residents more time to dispose of waste in the correct recycling bins.

As well as offering a better service for residents by cutting down on queuing time at the facilities, this booking system also improves recycling rates at the centres. Residents can book on the day or up to 14 days in advance, either online or over the phone.

[Read more here](#)

Theme 2:

Keeping county residents moving

Ensuring that county areas are well connected and residents have access to both good quality public transport and well-maintained road networks are vital for economic growth and people’s wellbeing.

This is why the CCN’s member councils place a great emphasis on helping keep county residents moving – not just through maintaining the physical infrastructure but in providing or subsidising the actual means of transport too. However, it is well documented that the last decade has seen a marked decline in the availability of public transport in virtually all areas of England outside the major cities.

In some areas these routes are lifeline services for local people and as this section illustrates, CCN member councils have stepped in to save routes by subsidising their own services. Others have taken new approaches to public transport, such as providing ‘on demand’ services for rural and remote locations that have few public transport options and which provide vital access to high streets and medical centres.

For the CCN members that were successful in securing funding from the previous government’s National Bus Strategy, many have begun transforming their local services.

Of course, physical infrastructure is as vital as the means of transport. Despite covering some of the largest areas in England, CCN’s member councils run effective and proactive winter gritting campaigns to ensure that county roads remain usable during the worst cold weather.

As this County Spotlight shows, gritting is not just confined to roads. With more being done to encourage greener methods of travel, county and unitary councils have begun gritting programmes of cycleways that are separate to roads.



Lincolnshire County Council

On-demand bus service to serve rural and remote areas

Callconnect is Lincolnshire County Council's on-demand bus service, serving rural and remote areas throughout the county that do not have traditional bus services, for over two decades.

The service launched in 2001 and in recent years the authority has made several improvements such as such as launching an app to book the bus and, recently, enabling contactless payments on the service. In 2023 the authority price-capped journeys at £2: making the service more affordable at a time of high costs of living.

For the price cap, the county council could not access the government's subsidy as it is not a traditional bus service – so has matched the fare cap using its own money to ensure that the on-demand service remains as useable to as many people in Lincolnshire as possible.

[Read more here](#)

Staffordshire County Council

Gritting the equivalent of 80,000 miles during winter

Highways crews in Staffordshire have worked around the clock to keep the county's roads safe this winter: gritting the equivalent of 80,000 miles in just a matter of months.

From October to March, 40 gritters treated 80,670 miles across Staffordshire when the temperatures plummeted; ensuring they were safe for motorists to drive on. Over 13,000 tonnes of salt was used – the equivalent would fill up 13 swimming pools.

With temperatures now forecast to get warmer, the council is now shifting its focus on to a new £8m extra investment programme to fix more roads during 24/25, which is part of the council's £53m annual highway spend.

[Read more here](#)

Central Bedfordshire Council

Stepping in to save lifeline bus route

A vital bus route that residents rely on in Bedfordshire has been saved thanks to the area's unitary council.

Earlier this year, passengers faced losing a Bedford to Flitwick service after operator Stagecoach withdrew the route, citing commercial reasons. Because the service is relied on by local residents, Central Bedfordshire Council stepped in to subsidise local operator Grant Palmer extending an existing service to cover parts of Flitwick that would have had no buses.

The extended route will include a service to Bedford Park and Ride and Maulden. Bedford Borough Council is also supporting the route alongside Central Bedfordshire Council, using money awarded to the area from their Bus Service Improvement Plan.

[Read more here](#)

Devon County Council

Gritting a city's major cycling routes during winter

Gritting does not just extend to roads – Devon County Council has begun to de-ice cycling paths in the county's biggest city to support active travel.

The county council first began a trial of gritting Exeter's main cycle routes in winter 2021, and has since extended the scheme over the following years. A small vehicle is deployed to put liquid de-icer across 14 miles across the city, focusing on city trails where more than 1,000 daily trips take place as well as areas that have connectivity with roads.

The initiative has been given good feedback from cyclists, and the council has been able to test its effectiveness using cycle count data on the routes de-iced. Nearly nine in ten Exeter Cycling Campaign users said they would be more inclined to cycle in winter if they knew paths were treated.

[Read more here](#)

Norfolk County Council

Transforming Norfolk's buses in £50m blueprint

Norfolk County Council was successful in securing £49.5m in government funding to improve the county's buses two years ago – and has been busy transforming services.

The county council's bid included ambitions to lower fares, introduce new and more frequent services, deliver more real-time information, upgrade waiting facilities – and more. Last year, the authority announced 25% discounts on weekly and monthly tickets and has introduced capped fares to £1.50 per journey in King's Lynn, Great Yarmouth and Thetford.

In tandem with this, it also has introduced new faster and more frequent bus services from rural areas in North Norfolk to Norwich, as well as on other inter-urban corridors, thereby cutting down on travel times to try and make public transport more attractive for residents.

[Read more here](#)

Nottinghamshire County Council

Filling the gaps where bus operators have withdrawn

Nottinghamshire County Council has stepped in to fill in the gaps where bus operators have withdrawn routes across the county.

Nottsbus on Demand, a demand-responsive transport service, was launched in 2022. It offers residents flexible travel to medical appointments and leisure activities as well as connections to other public transport including trains, trams and bus stations. Journeys can be booked via an app or a phonecall and the service travels where users request them to go within a specific operating zone, rather than following a fixed timetable.

The council recently announced an expansion of the service with the launch of the new South Newark zone to cover villages between Newark and Bingham. This is the fifth zone in Nottinghamshire alongside others focusing mainly on villages around Ollerton, Mansfield and West Rushcliffe in Nottinghamshire.

[Read more here](#)

Theme 3:

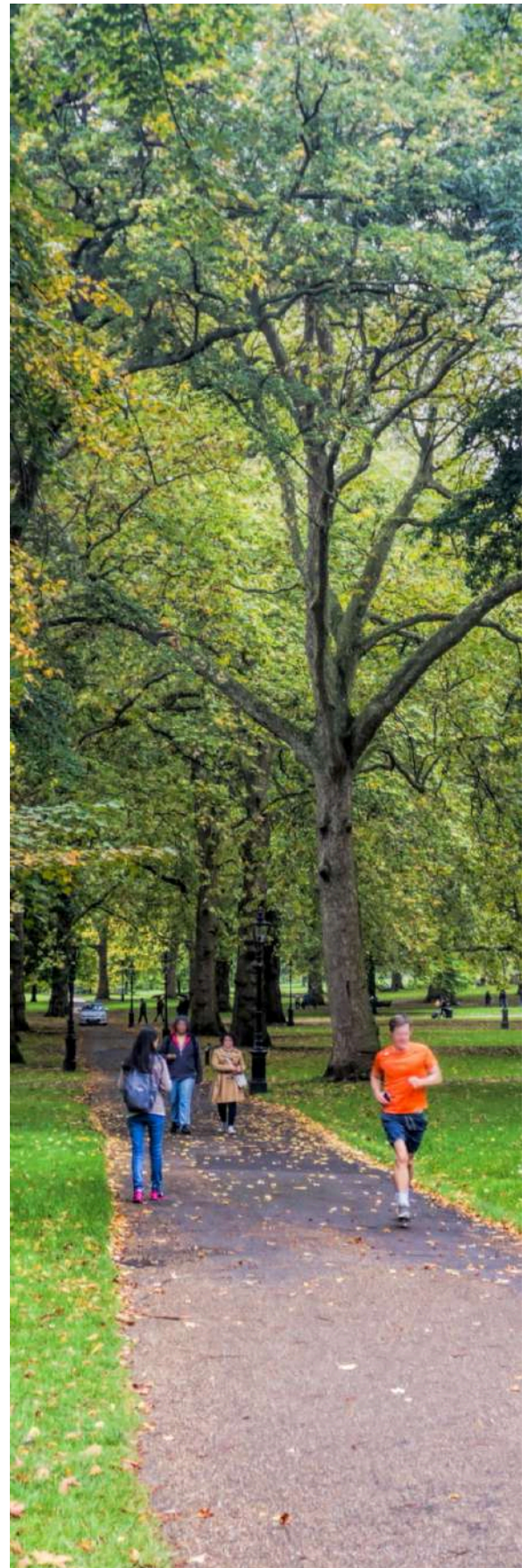
Parks, streetlights and keeping counties tidy

The areas covered by the CCN’s member councils are amongst the most picturesque in England: from ragged coastlines, to dramatic national parks, to quaint villages. Keeping their local areas tidy and attractive is an important responsibility for councils, not only in enhancing the lives of residents but in encouraging tourism and investment.

CCN’s county council members have responsibility for country parks, and its unitary members have responsibility all local parks. Both of these amenities proved to be lifelines for people during the pandemic, as well as popular destinations for locals and tourists alike. Councils work hard to maintain their parks and make them as accessible as possible: winning regional and national awards whilst others have improved local services on offer within these parks to make them inclusive to people’s differing needs.

With flytipping a clear blight for local areas, the CCN’s unitary councils are taking steps to prevent offences and crack down on offenders, winning awards for their hard-hitting campaigns which have yielded results. As part of this, local street furniture is an important part of an area’s look and feel. Services such as streetlights are vital for local residents each and every day and CCN’s members are undertaking significant transformation plans to move to climate-friendly LED-bulbs as part of their net-zero plans.

As county authorities typically cover large areas, these programmes need to be meticulously planned and delivered. Other counties are embracing new technology, such as installing smart infrastructure in their street furniture. Finally, other county authorities have bold ambitions to improve their local environment and tackle climate change by planting a substantial number of trees over the next decade and beyond.



Essex County Council

Replacing over 100,000 lights with LED bulbs

Essex County Council is undertaking an ambitious light replacement scheme that will see over 130,000 bulbs changed to LED lamps across the county.

The county council has replaced more than 100,000 of its lamps with new LED lights. These save around 75% of energy so are more climate friendly and they can last for up to 20 years – therefore producing significant savings. This will save 6,500 tonnes of carbon per year.

Essex Highways crews have been replacing the bulbs at a rate of over 600 lights a week, and they each have sensors so they can be dimmed remotely. Staff at the authority have had to battle against a variety of challenges, including stock issues due to the war in Ukraine and the pandemic causing shortages of components.

[Read more here](#)

Wiltshire Council

Award-winning flytipping campaign sees offences decline

Wiltshire Council's hard-hitting flytipping campaign has won a national award and has yielded results, with the number of offences declining.

The unitary council launched its We're Targeting Flytippers (WTF) won the Environmental Campaign of the Year Award at the prestigious Keep Britain Tidy Awards earlier this year. With flytipping a major issue for a lot of residents, the council has pledged £150,000 a year over a three year period to employ more officers and invest in more equipment such as covert cameras to catch offenders, generating national media.

Importantly, it has led to a reduction in crimes – 5.1 fly-tips per 1,000 people took place in 2022/23, compared to 7.4 in 2021/22. From April to September 2022, there were 25 fixed penalty notices issued and 11 successful prosecutions, compared to 5 FPNs and 2 prosecutions over the same period in the year prior. Since then, prosecutions have continued to rise and offences have continued to fall.

[Read more here](#)

Oxfordshire County Council

Installing smart infrastructure in new pilot scheme

Oxfordshire County Council is to purchase and test 'smart' street posts that boost wireless coverage and are capable of housing electric vehicle (EV) charging points at a busy city transit hub.

The county council was one of six authorities that successfully bid for £250,000 to trial this smart technology on everyday infrastructure. The council will purchase 15 smart, multi-purpose lighting columns for Oxford, and the columns will provide a 1.5km 'connected corridor' route from the revamped Oxford train station up to the city centre. These will house equipment for free public wifi, as well as the ability to house EV charging.

But those aren't the only benefits – the connected corridor will also provide connectivity opportunities for transport, local commerce, education, and more. This project provides a secure sandbox environment for the council to explore other digital and smart opportunities. Fellow CCN member Cambridgeshire County Council also received funding from the government.

[Read more here](#)

North Northamptonshire Council

Making local parks more inclusive for those with disabilities

North Northamptonshire Council has made a popular beauty spot near Corby more inclusive for people with disabilities by installing a Changing Places Toilet.

The unitary council has opened a brand new toilet facility in East Carlton Park which helps people who are limited in their mobility and need equipment to assist them. The toilet has a powered height-adjustable changing table, a sink that raises and lowers, a ceiling hoist and grab rails.

A total of eight Changing Places Toilets have also been installed in the main towns and country parks across the north of the county.

This helps encourage people with disabilities and mobility or their carers to visit these places making them more inclusive. The council hopes the facilities will make a 'huge difference to many people', by encouraging those with disabilities and mobility or their carers to visit these places making them more inclusive.

[Read more here](#)

Gloucestershire County Council

Ambition to plant over 1 million trees by 2030

Gloucestershire County Council has a bold ambition to plant one million trees by 2030, as part of the council's Local Nature Partnership's plan to boost the environment and fight climate change.

In last year's planting season, the authority planted over 130,000 trees across 124 projects in Gloucestershire, bringing the total planted so far to 395,454 with the council helped in its endeavours by its partners, volunteers and individuals. The comprehensive planting season included 25,800 trees from the Woodland Trust, 4,605 community tree packs for schools and 2,925 more trees for woods. Other projects included the council's Bournside Project, which created a green corridor of over 3,000 trees.

The county council said it wants to create a greener Gloucestershire to improve the area's natural habitat for wildlife, replace fallen trees, boost residents' mental health and tackle climate change.

[Read more here](#)

Kent County Council

Four of Kent's country parks win gold at regional awards

Four of Kent's country parks have won gold at last year's South and South East in Bloom Awards.

The awards are the largest horticultural campaign in the region, and gave a gold award to Brockhill Country Park (which was named Country Park of the Year) as well as Lullingstone, Shorne Woods and Trosley country parks. All of these are operated by Kent County Council.

As well as the flowers and foliage at the parks, the awards also recognise the educational opportunities at each location, as well as how inclusive and easy to navigate they are. Many of the parks that achieved gold have education spaces within them, as well as mobility scooter hire and Changing Places toilets. They were also lauded for their regular events.

[Read more here](#)

Theme 4:

Supporting the next generation of learners

Whilst councils' role in education has changed over the last three decades, local authorities still retain a number of key responsibilities that are vital to parents' everyday lives.

The CCN's members have a responsibility for school places: arguably one of the most important milestones in a young person's life.

Councils have worked to improve local capacity and their own processes to ensure that as many families as possible receive their first-choice school, with many CCN members boasting first preference rates of over 95%. This has been accomplished through capital investment in school places, using projected population growth data to make early decisions and in what kind of provision (such as more specialist school capacity in areas with higher demand).

Councils are also working with local partners to reduce pollution and congestion around schools, whilst others are upgrading their school bus fleet to more climate friendly options.

With the cost of living and mental health still a challenge, some CCN member councils have gone above and beyond the previous government's Household Support Fund and have funded holiday food vouchers to help struggling families, as well as investing in children's mental health support.

Councils' education offer is not just simply confined to their work in overseeing their schools network. It can also include operating and educational facilities within their areas, such as outdoor education centres. And rather than standing still, councils continue to invest millions in improving and modernising these centres so they are fit for the future.



Northumberland County Council

Virtually every family gets first-choice primary preference

Virtually every Northumbrian family who applied for a primary school place for their child for the 2024/24 academic year got their first choice preference.

Thanks to the hard work of officers at Northumberland County Council, first preference primary school places went to 98% of applicants, out of over 2,500 applications. The unitary council said that it recognises how important it is for pupils to go to their most local, or preferred, school and with the 93% of the county's schools rated Good or Outstanding by Ofsted, over 40,000 pupils attend either a Good or Outstanding school.

Separately, the council is currently undertaking its largest-ever investment programme into Northumberland schools, with over £100m channelled into refurbishing and rebuilding schools in the county. Alongside this, the council spends £2m a year on schools maintenance.

[Read more here](#)

Hampshire County Council

Creating 20,000 extra school places in just over a decade

Hampshire County Council has proposed to build ten new schools and expand nine existing schools (maintaining a focus on special schools) over the next three years, to meet current demand and as part of planned housing developments.

With new housing developments continuing to drive demand in Hampshire, if these new school places are delivered the county council would have created close to 20,000 additional school places since 2013.

Despite ongoing cost pressures, the council said this planned investment, outlined in its capital Children's Services Capital Programme, is vital to ensure that as many children as possible can continue to access a local school.

[Read more here](#)

East Riding of Yorkshire Council

Pioneering partnership to reduce pollution around schools

East Riding of Yorkshire Council is pioneering a new approach to restrict traffic outside schools for a short period each day at school opening and closing to reduce congestion and cut down on pollution.

School Streets, a trial in conjunction with Humberside Police, has begun at two schools in Anlaby and Burton Pidsea, having been trialled at seven other schools across East Riding since 2020. As well as improving congestion, the scheme aims to make going to school safer for pupils as well as encouraging more active methods of travel.

The restriction has been in place for a number of weeks now, with the schools taking part in the trial observing that there has been a significant reduction in traffic on roads near to them. Separately, 97% of pupils across the county received their first-choice secondary school for the 2024/25 academic year.

[Read more here](#)

Cambridgeshire County Council

Holiday food vouchers

Cambridgeshire County Council has this year committed over £3m in its budget to help struggling families over the school holiday and tackle young people's mental health challenges.

The authority allocated £3m to continue providing holiday food vouchers for those on free school meals during 2024/25, due to uncertainty at the time over the national Household Support Grant. This funding will be aimed at struggling families who are still feeling the effects of the ongoing cost-of-living crisis.

The county council has also allocated £320,000 to address children's mental health, with evidence showing that it has worsened following the Covid pandemic. The funding will be used to employ trained specialists to work with schools to design and deliver programmes working with children and young people, teachers and parents with interventions that are known to address anxiety.

[Read more here](#)

North Yorkshire Council

Inspiring young people to connect with their county

A multi-million-pound revamp to breathe new life into outdoor education centres is taking place in North Yorkshire.

North Yorkshire Council is spending £4.2m on modernising Bewerley Park in the Nidderdale Area of Outstanding Beauty and East Barnby in the North Yorkshire Moors, which are two flagship outdoor education centres that have hosted trips for thousands of young people down the years. The centres offer residential and day courses for primary and secondary schools, through to higher education, youth, and adult groups. They are also used as venues for day trips and staff development, making them key sites for education in the county.

The first phase of the development is scheduled for completion in 2025 and will provide new accommodation at Bewerley Park with 84 beds and to make improvements at East Barnby accommodation blocks and dining room.

[Read more here](#)

Warwickshire County Council

Upgrading school buses to environmentally-friendly transport

Warwickshire County Council has upgraded a selection of its school buses to environmentally-friendly transport, making them far better for the environment than its previous fleet.

The ten new home to school transport buses, which cost just under £900,000 were rolled out in 2021 and deliver greater fuel economy as well as emitting less pollution. The buses have been fitted with their own solar panels which will allow air conditioning to be powered via renewable sources.

These buses are part of the county council's climate change and net-zero aims, with these buses also being used for adult transport and across a range of other services. This year, the council was successful in receiving £4.3m from the government to roll out 27 electric buses for public transport, serving major county locations such as Warwick and Nuneaton.

[Read more here](#)



THE VOICE OF COUNTIES

Founded in 1997, the County Councils Network is a network of 20 county councils and 17 unitary authorities that serve county areas.

The network is a cross party organisation, expressing the views of member councils to the Local Government Association and to the government.

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COUNTY SPOTLIGHT