

Cabinet
6 November 2023
Public & Local Member Questions

	Public Question Time
6.1	<p>Question from Steve Baille Now BlackRock has said ESG (Environmental Social Corporate Governance) has failed, will the council still push it's climate, social such as drag story times and Corporate control agendas ? So many organisations and Corporations have been fooled by this which has been pushed by BlackRock and Vanguard which are some of the largest investment organisations in the world. https://finance.yahoo.com/news/davos-2023-blackrock-u-inflows-125746960.html</p> <p>Response from the Cabinet Member for Finance Council policies are not the same as ESG, which is about an approach to investment. Norfolk Pension Fund believes that the integration of financially material ESG factors into the investment decision-making process will improve the chances of optimising long term returns for the Fund, to the benefit of its members and sponsoring employers. A summary of this policy can be found at: Statement on Disinvestment/Exclusion & ESG (Environmental, Social & Governance) Aspects of Investment Strategy - March 2022 Norfolk Pension Fund.</p>
6.2	<p>Question from Helena Hallas How would the cabinet member recommend students keep themselves safe when travelling on foot to/from University after studying, working or socialising after midnight on campus/in Norwich City Centre?</p> <p>Response from the Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport Many students travel to and from the University campus by bus and the County Council is in discussions with the UEA about jointly funding a trial of a night bus between the campus and city centre as part of the delivery of the Bus Service Improvement Plan. There are eleven Beryl bike/e-bike/e-scooter bays on the UEA campus and over 137 bays across Greater Norwich so use of the Beryl network could be considered for travel at a time when other transport options may be limited.</p> <p>The Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) via its community safety work will be working closely with the police and university and colleges around keeping students safe, Specialist charities such as the Lucy Lamplugh Trust (leaflet enclosed) also offer general safety advice to students. https://www.suzylamplugh.org/students-and-personal-safety</p>
6.3	<p>Question from Gemma Spinks How much would it cost to extend the hours of the street lights that are turned on till 3am on the following roads in Norwich:</p> <p>North Park Avenue South Park Avenue Bluebell Road Earlham Road</p>

Gipsy Lane
Wycliffe Road
Wilberforce Road
Friends Road
The Avenues
Earlham Green Lane

Response from the Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport

Apart from Wycliffe Road and Friends Road which are part-night lit until midnight and then come back on at 5am, the remainder of the above listed sites are already illuminated throughout the night.

Before considering any review of Wycliffe Road and Friends Road to be illuminated all night (with dimming), the impacts on energy consumption, CO₂ and upgrades to streetlighting equipment to facilitate a change would need to be investigated. Without undertaking this investigative work, we are unable to provide a cost.

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Public Question Time

7.1 Question from Cllr Matthew Reilly

Can the County Council confirm what discussions it has had with the police and what measures it has put in place to ensure students, particularly female students, feel safe after midnight?

Response from the Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport

The Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) via its community safety work will be working closely with the police and university and colleges around keeping students safe, Specialist charities such as the Lucy Lamplugh Trust (leaflet enclosed) also offer general safety advice to students.

<https://www.suzylamplugh.org/students-and-personal-safety>

7.2 Question from Cllr Ben Price

A statement released by the Norfolk Pension Fund in March 2022 said that “NPF does not operate a divestment or exclusion policy with regards to any company.” In 2019 this council made a climate declaration where we said “We agree to lead by example and demonstrate our actions and responsibilities in tackling climate change.” Freedom of information requests by environmental campaigners found that, despite decreases in recent years, UK local government pensions held £9.7 billion of investments in fossil fuel companies in the 2019/20 financial year. Will the cabinet member for finance address the NPF’s contradictory approach to our climate commitments when drafting our treasury management policy for 2024/25?

[statement-on-divestment-esg-aspects-of-investment-strategy-march-2022.pdf](https://www.norfolkpensionfund.org/statement-on-divestment-esg-aspects-of-investment-strategy-march-2022.pdf)
([norfolkpensionfund.org](https://www.norfolkpensionfund.org))

Response from the Cabinet Member for Finance

Thank you for your question. The Pension Fund is not responsible for the County Council’s Treasury Management Policy and this is entirely separate from the investment strategy of the Pension Fund. Alongside the majority of LGPS funds and institutional investors, the Fund continues to believe that the effective integration of financially material ESG factors into investment processes remains the most appropriate approach to optimise long terms returns, for the benefit of its members and sponsoring employers (the fund represents 400+ employers in addition to the County Council). The sole purpose of an LGPS Fund is to pay the benefits due to those members, on time and in full. The Fund takes this purpose and its role as an institutional investor extremely seriously. The Fund monitors and publishes climate risk metrics for its public equity portfolios as part of its approach to ESG risk management. This can be found at [Climate risk reporting - June 2023](https://www.norfolkpensionfund.org/Climate-risk-reporting-June-2023) ([norfolkpensionfund.org](https://www.norfolkpensionfund.org)). This demonstrates that the Fund has substantially better quantifiable climate risk characteristics than global equity benchmarks and considers that companies across all sectors contribute to global emissions and will ultimately form part of an effective and just transition. It is less clear how responsible investors simply blanket

selling positions in some companies to other actors will contribute to the transition to a lower emission economy. In addition, the Fund is a substantial investor in renewable energy solutions and forestry via its real asset portfolios that form part of its diversified investment strategy.

Second question from Cllr Ben Price

Can the Cabinet member provide me with an update on the next steps for Wensum Lodge which would include further information on: when adult education courses officially finish at the site, new provision for practical classroom-based studies, securing Wensum Lodge when it closes and the associated costs for that security is, and the work undertaken so far in the development of “meanwhile” lease agreement?

Response from the Cabinet Member for Communities and Partnerships

As set out in the July Cabinet report, we will continue to deliver some courses from Wensum Lodge until the end of the 2023 calendar year to enable a period of transition, and would look to vacate the building fully by early 2024. Some classroom based courses have already moved to new locations and others will change to new locations for the start of 2024.

We knew that securing new locations for our Silversmithing and pottery/ceramics programmes would be more challenging because of the specialist requirements for delivering these courses. I am happy to say that we have identified new venues for both of these and will continue to offer courses for learners. We will need to take a short break from classes in the new year whilst we move to the new locations and to give us time to move equipment and reconfigure the new venues, as well as replacing some of the older equipment with new. We will confirm the locations of the new venues as soon as we have the relevant contractual arrangements in place, which should be very soon. In the meantime, we are keeping staff and learners updated.

Site management arrangements once service delivery ends have not been finalised yet and the security cost is therefore not known. The Council is looking to secure the long-term future of the site and is currently providing information / supporting access to the site, should a qualifying community group want to take on the freehold under the ACV process.

7.3 Question from Cllr Catherine Rowett

Many have been inconvenienced by “once in a blue moon” flooding in the South Norfolk area, in the recent storm (though our problems barely got a mention in warnings and news bulletins). Can the Cabinet Member update on how the work of the Norfolk Strategic Flooding Alliance will be expedited to prevent such disasters again, especially as a warming climate increases the frequency of extreme downpours?

Response from the Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste

The Norfolk Strategic Flooding Alliance brings together all the agencies and organisations in the county with responsibilities for water management and flooding.

Its partners have a track record of quick response to dealing with emergency flooding, as well as completing investigations and delivering long-term solutions where possible. In addition, the Alliance has worked to highlight what landowners and property owners can do to help where they have responsibilities for caring for watercourses and ditches on or adjacent to their property.

In the face of climate change the Alliance is also looking at the changing nature of flood risk that this is bringing and working with specialists and academics to get a detailed understanding of the future implications for Norfolk of this so that it can inform future decisions.

Second question from Cllr Catherine Rowett

Intensive farming and arable agriculture using nitrogen fertilisers contribute a high proportion of the nutrient pollution that affects our waterways, thereby delaying housing development in places where it is needed. Schemes to reduce agricultural emissions, by taking land out of use, or converting it to less damaging uses, are therefore helpful, if they can permanently reduce the overall flow of pollutants. Does this council have powers to restrict the conversion of land to more intensive polluting types of agriculture, or do other authorities/organisations operate regulatory systems, to ensure that we can enforce and maintain important reductions in effluent that will have been paid for in offsetting schemes?

Response from the Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste

Enforcement of pollution is undertaken by the Environment Agency. Issues around land use are defined within the National Planning Policy Framework and managed by Local Planning Authorities.

7.4 Question from Cllr Paul Neale

The cabinet member for highways continues to make one bad decision after another. He has decided to exclude the public and media from highways decisions, claiming it would improve democracy; reversed the Exchange Street pedestrian and cycling only scheme because too many people broke the law, and claimed the mass loss of replacement trees on the NDR was because it was dangerous to water them, to name just a few of his gems. He also seems unable to provide definitive costs for the NWL. Before his bizarre decision making becomes a complete car crash, will he now resign?

Response from the Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport

I don't accept your opening remarks. I have taken action where action was needed to resolve ongoing issues. I have provided context where a situation was not straightforward, and I have responded appropriately by not confirming details before the work that would inform them has been completed.

I take the responsibility of being a Norfolk County Council cabinet member very seriously, as I believe this shows, and it's disappointing that Cllr Neale is unable to see this. There is no basis whatsoever to call for my resignation and, to confirm, I intend to continue to work hard in this role and deliver good results for the people of Norfolk, which recently have included securing funding for 70 new electric buses, ongoing delivery of the £50m Bus Service Improvement Plan and Transforming Cities measures.

Second question from Cllr Paul Neale

Recently the Leader of this council in an unusual personal and baseless attack on environmentalist Dr Andrew Boswell, branded him a "misguided individual". Will she now retract her attack on Dr Boswell and apologise in light of a Court of Appeal judge now permitting him the right to appeal, saying Dr Boswell's appeal "has a real prospect of success" which to me does not sound misguided as the Leader of the council claimed?

Response from the Leader and Cabinet Member for Strategy and Governance

I do not agree with your interpretation of my comments and stand by my assertion that this person is misguided in their actions in trying to prevent vital infrastructure from being built in our county. Not only are they wasting time in preventing us bringing these much-needed upgrades to our roads, but they have also cost the taxpayer millions of pounds unnecessarily, which would have been better spent on further improvements.

Infrastructure plays a crucial role in Norfolk for all residents. We are traditionally behind other places with our outdated road network and yet Dr Boswell seeks to prevent us from levelling-up and bringing future economic growth to our county with his idealistic views. These three schemes at Blofield, Easton and Thickthorn will improve safety, cut congestion and pollution on key routes and I'm keen that we deliver these for our residents sooner rather than later.

What people don't need, especially in these challenging economic times, is for money to be wasted on expensive and pointless legal cases; because as the Councillor will know, Norfolk County Council has to meet its own legal costs, irrespective of the recent Court ruling in our favour.

Dr Boswell himself is quoted as saying about the ruling of Judge Mrs Justice Thornton 'The judge may well have been right in her conclusion', which our Norfolk residents could very well read as admission and accepting of defeat on Dr Boswell's behalf on this particular issue. Instead of accepting this and allowing us to get on with these vital improvements, we are faced with further delay and costs as a result of this appeal. I would suggest that it is Dr Boswell who should be apologising instead and to the people of Norfolk for his unwarranted intervention in these vital road safety schemes.

7.5 Question from Cllr Jamie Osborn

Residents of the city centre have for years been affected by high levels of air pollution. As the local member, I've repeatedly asked for air quality monitoring around St Giles and Bethel Street since being elected, to provide the data needed to inform decisions about the transport network in the city centre. With the Cabinet Member having reversed the Exchange Street decision unilaterally with no clear evidence behind it, will he now agree to finally monitor air quality around these streets?

Response from the Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport

As you are a Member of the City Council, you will be aware that air quality monitoring is the responsibility of the City Council in Norwich. Five new pollution monitoring diffusion tubes have been installed by them around Bethel Street and St Giles, and the results will be shared with the Council as part of our close working relationship. Due to seasonal fluctuations, it is hard to get a full picture until there is a full year of results. However, the tubes are changed monthly, so we will be able to monitor monthly variations. The use of diffusion tubes are the accepted way of measuring nitrogen dioxide levels by DEFRA and is the recognised method of carrying out this monitoring.

Supplementary question from Cllr Jamie Osborn

The second National Infrastructure Assessment, commissioned by the Government, last month explicitly recommended placing "practical limits on access to road space by private cars" to reduce congestion. Among the options recommended to achieve this are a workplace parking levy, congestion charges, and physically reallocating space from cars to

walking, wheeling and cycling. Can the Cabinet Member outline in detail progress on such measures?

Response from the Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport

Recently, the national picture around these types of measures has altered significantly, culminating in the recent publication by the Department for Transport of 'The Plan for Drivers'. Combined with the ongoing delay in the Department for Transport publishing Local Transport Plan guidance, we are keen to avoid any potentially abortive work and will review our approach to assessing measures such as these as soon as the Local Transport Plan guidance is finally issued.

7.6 Question from Cllr Steffan Aquarone

Some people will welcome the announcement of funding for the Norwich Western Link, after the Government has agreed to foot 85% of the cost. However, this is working off 2021 estimates and the cost, in line with inflation and other pressures, is likely to be a lot higher. How does this Council plan to fill this potentially significant funding gap?

Response from the Leader and Cabinet Member for Strategy and Governance

Any update to the budget that was agreed in July 2022 will be included in the report to our Cabinet next month. This is currently being reviewed, along with the project timetable, in light of the very welcome funding announcement and commitment we received from the government in October.

When the Department for Transport (DfT) announced its approval of our Outline Business Case for the Norwich Western Link, they confirmed that there was potential for their contribution to the overall cost of the project to be increased above 85%, following a recent announcement by the Prime Minister. This is clearly very positive as it would mean more national investment coming into Norfolk. We are discussing this with DfT colleagues and, with our strong business case, we will be well-positioned to secure further investment from the government.

Second question from Cllr Steffan Aquarone

Please could the Cabinet Member provide the figure for the amount spent in compensation to Norfolk's drivers for damages caused to their vehicles due to the condition of Norfolk's roads?

Response from the Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport

In the three-year period 1st April 2020 to 31st March 2023 we received 931 claims where the allegation was that a pothole on the network has caused damage to a vehicle. Of that number the Council admitted liability on 203 claims and compensated these claimants to the sum of £58,978. Within the 931 claims there are still 11 claims that remain open and in dispute and therefore no payment has been made.

7.7 Question from Cllr Brian Watkins

For 24/25 to meet the planned savings target how many older people who would have gone to care homes with council support will now be assessed as being supported in their home. Further, to meet the savings target how many residents currently supporting care homes will be re assessed as suitable to return to living in their own homes.

Response from the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care

Thank you for the question.

People tell us that wherever possible they would rather stay in their own home provided they have the right care and support so they can continue to live independently.

Through our Promoting Independence strategy, we have a number of different ways we can support people to continue living at home – rather than go into residential care. These include assistive technology where new innovations come on stream every year, through our Norfolk First Support service, through home care, occupational therapy, and housing adaptations. Our Independent Living Housing programme that is building accommodation that is suitable for people who are no longer able to stay at home but not quite ready to enter a long-term residential placement.

With these increased options we think going forward we can support around an additional 300 people a year to continue to live their lives in their homes.

Our focus is on supporting new people to the service, so our savings are not predicated on reassessing anyone already in residential care unless they ask us to. We will of course always consider the most suitable environment to meet a person's needs as part of our regular reviews of service under the Care Act.

7.8 Question from Cllr David Sayers

Given the flood risk advisories for King's Lynn this weekend from Storm Ciaran and isolated flooding from Storm Babet, I seek reassurance from Norfolk County Council as the lead local flood authority. Residents, especially around Peppers Green, are deeply concerned about the current state of sustainable drainage systems locally, which appear to be reaching their limit. There is also anxiety that the forthcoming developments at Knights Hill with further strain these systems, potentially resulting in significant property flooding. Can the cabinet address these pressing concerns?

Response from the Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste

I fully appreciate the concerns and worry that flooding can cause and to address those the County Council has made large scale commitments to address flood risk, including dedicating additional funding for this and establishing the Norfolk Strategic Flooding Alliance.

In relation to sustainable drainage, the County Council in its role as a Lead Local Authority is involved in consultations on large scale developments by Local Planning Authorities and consistently provides evidenced based responses to those, with the final decisions made by the Local Planning Authorities.

And in response to your reference to specific locations I will ask County Council officers to review those locations and raise concerns with the Local Planning Authority as required and we will fully investigate issues of internal flooding to properties as they occur, so that the right actions can be identified for the right organisations and bodies.

Second question from Cllr David Sayers

There have been two recent accidents on Fenland Road which have caused damage to properties, will further road safety measures be considered to alleviate these issues?

Response from the Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport

The Council prioritises its limited safety engineering budget to the locations with the highest number of recorded personal injury accidents, as these cause the most harm. Around 2,000 of these are recorded each year across Norfolk. There have been no recorded personal injury accidents on Fen Road in the last 3 years so this does not justify a safety engineering intervention. However, I would be happy to arrange a site inspection by the local Highway Engineer to see if there are any low-cost measures that may help.

7.9 Question from Cllr Sharon Blundell

In terms of the rates childcare settings are provided by the council, Norfolk is ranked one of the lowest in the country. This prevents settings from retaining staff and makes some financially unviable. Will the cabinet member consider increasing these rates?

Response from the Cabinet Member for Children's Services

Early Education and Childcare funding rates are set using a national funding formula. As a local authority we consult with early years providers and a consultative group of early years providers to determine with Schools Forum the best local formula for distribution of this funding within a strict set of limited rules. We are not able to distribute more funding than we receive from central government. We remain in full agreement that funding rates remain too low.

In the Spring budget there were several announcements which have the potential to make a significant difference to the childcare market in Norfolk – this included from this term some increase in funding for 3-to-4-year-olds and a significant increase in the funding rate for 2-year-olds. Starting in April there will be a phasing in of extended entitlements for working families of children from 9 months of age. We have had conversations with many providers to explore the opportunities these new entitlements bring.

While it is true that some providers have closed recently, the reasons for these closures are mixed and not all have closed for financial reasons. Recruitment and retention are an issue nationwide – the Department for Education (DfE) are starting a national early year's recruitment campaign in the new year and are promoting early years apprenticeships to try and grow the workforce, but there remain significant challenges across the care and education sectors in recruiting and retaining staff as a result of competition from other sectors and the increased cost of living. We have also supported new providers to open and have an active childminder recruitment campaign where we are supporting more new childminders to enter the market with training and start-up funding. We continue to effectively support providers to adapt their business models and be sustainable.

The evidence suggests that despite significant challenges, Early Education and Childcare in Norfolk remains strong - the percentage of good and outstanding early years providers is slightly above the national average (the most recent figures show that 97% of Norfolk providers are good or outstanding, compared to 96% nationally) and the percentage of children who reach expected standards in the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile is above the national average in every Early Learning Goal.

7.10 Question from Cllr John Crofts

The recent storms have caused considerable flooding around areas in Roydon. Following correspondence from residents and the reporting of these problems to the County Council, a

flood investigation is due to be undertaken. The time scale of this investigation means that it will report in a years' time, does the cabinet member agree a year is too long and the residents affected by these floods deserve action now?

Response from the Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste

Flood investigation reports by the County Council in its role as a Lead Local Flood Authority are undertaken in relation to internal flooding of properties.

The scale and complexity of the flooding events locally, and across the county, help determine the time it takes to complete the investigations and the consultations that relate to those. This thorough and detailed process is key to making sure the right actions and responsibilities are established, and in relation to that process I will ensure that officers continue to treat fast completion of these investigations as a priority.

7.11 Question from Cllr Rob Colwell

Following another summer of misery for road users in West Norfolk, travelling North and South on the A149 in Kings Lynn, what reassurance can you give residents that Norfolk County Council are looking at significant improvements and capacity increase to this road in the near future?

Response from the Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport

We are committed to improving road infrastructure where necessary, as we have demonstrated with the Norwich Western Link. Work has just commenced on updating the King's Lynn Transport Strategy (KLTS), in partnership between the County Council and Borough Council, and it is considered that this should be carried out first before any feasibility work on improvements or dualling schemes for the A149, so that the wider network implications can also be assessed. The KLTS will include consideration of the A149 and the associated complementary sustainable transport improvements, in and around the town, that would be required to ensure government support for a significant road improvement scheme. The Borough Council are also keen to see scheme development work for an improvement/dualling scheme for the A149 but recognise the need to do this in the context of the KLTS which is anticipated to take around a year to complete.

Second question from Cllr Rob Colwell

Habitat restoration of the Gaywood river, a rare chalk stream, is being hampered by the lack of suitable dual hydrologic/hydraulic flood risk modelling of the Gaywood catchment to include Black and Bawsey drains. What financial support can Norfolk County Council provide towards a proposed joint report with the Environment Agency, KLIDB/WMA, Norfolk Rivers Trust, KLWNBC and other interested parties, to then unlock future national grants?

Response from the Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste

The County Council hosts the Norfolk Coast Partnership, and through this Partnership has an active working relationship with key stakeholders in the area such as the Norfolk Rivers Trust, the Borough Council of King's Lynn and West Norfolk, Natural England and many farmers and land managers.

That Partnership is the forum through which its involvement with projects in the area are progressed and we are currently working closely with partners to support and develop new projects and funding applications which have habitat and river restoration at their core, whilst also supporting species recovery and sustainable rural practices. This approach has notably

resulted in the development and award of a landscape recovery project along the north Norfolk coast and several other initiatives delivered through funding from the National Heritage Lottery Fund, which have significantly improved chalk river habitat with the area.

7.12 Question from Cllr Terry Jermy

The proposals for the Abbey Estate in Thetford, part of my Thetford West division, will see this community increase by some 500 homes. But the memorandum of understanding commits both Breckland Council and Norfolk County Council to seek no section 106 contributions from the developer. How will the County Council ensure the necessary infrastructure is put in place to cope with the increased demand linked to these new homes?

Response from the Cabinet Member for Corporate Services and Innovation

The County Council is supportive of the proposed regeneration of the Abbey Estate, and in its role as a statutory consultee and infrastructure provider will seek to ensure that the redevelopment comes forward in a way that provides appropriate infrastructure and opportunities for both existing and future residents. Children's Services are aware of the proposal and is planning accordingly for the wider Thetford area and has an additional three primary schools safeguarded for the future and has secured funds to allow for further expansion of secondary capacity. The County Council will also expect to see improved facilities to support active travel measures as well as public transport infrastructure.

7.13 Question from Cllr Alison Birmingham

Concerns have been raised about migrant workers at risk of being exploited by social care employers. Migrant care workers can be trapped in inadequate housing, paid the lowest wages and locked into unfair contracts. Often they have paid to come and work in these difficult conditions and fear speaking out and losing their right to work and their job.

I hope that Adult Social Care checks that no employer they commission engages in such practices. Is there any information that the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Services can share concerning the commissioned workforce and these rogue employers?

Response from the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care

Thank you for your question.

I recognise the risks and issues that you describe, and we take this very seriously. Following the introduction of the health and social care visa, the Government has set up the International Recruitment Fund in February 2023 requiring each region to work in partnership to access funding to support ethical international recruitment in their region. Norfolk is the lead sponsor for the eastern region, and we have been working with all 12 councils in the east to put in place resources and support for care providers and international recruits to champion ethical practice. Examples include webinars and 1:1 support around sponsorship, ethical recruitment, modern slavery, anti-racist practice and cultural orientation and pastoral care. The programme is also offering practical support around driving skills and mock compliance audits for care providers. But we also know that it can be difficult to know about unacceptable practice until it is too late. We have therefore also written to all providers and commissioned an audit of a sample of the care providers that we work with who hold sponsorship certificates to seek assurance around practice and improve learning.

The government and the Local Government Association are also starting to launch more guidance on this subject. The LGA has just published guidance for local authorities around modern slavery risk assessment and due diligence for adult social care, which we review and take any necessary action.

We are working closely with the Department of Health and Social Care through regular monthly meetings. We are sharing learning from the partnership and also lobbying for further data sharing from the Home Office, to have better insight about the number and location of sponsorships within a local area.

7.14 Question from Cllr Colleen Walker

I'm sure the entire Cabinet share the shock and disappointment of Great Yarmouth that Hemsby has been cruelly denied the funding required to protect against coastal erosion and is now watching as more homes and land are claimed by the sea. The people have been let down and left to fend for themselves despite promises of support. I ask the entire Cabinet to take responsibility where no others have been willing. Will you find the money to help the desperate people of Hemsby protect their homes and livelihoods or to start again somewhere else?

Response from the Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste

As you are aware, the lead roles and responsibilities for coastal matters in Norfolk sit with other bodies and organisations, such as Defra, the Environment Agency, Coastal Partnerships East and the local district councils.

However, the County Council shares the deep concerns and will continue to use its involvement with those bodies to help secure and influence the best possible outcomes for Norfolk's residents and communities, as was demonstrated by our Motion to Full Council on 26th September, which was unanimously supported..

Supplementary question from Cllr Colleen Walker

Will the Cabinet also join me in sending heartfelt thanks especially to the lifeboat crews working so hard for the people of Hemsby and all those others doing their best to support those at risk? Will they please make sure their efforts are not in vain.

Response from the Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste

The efforts and commitment of all organisations, groups and individuals involved with dealing with the challenges and changing situation at Hemsby are fully respected and greatly appreciated by both me and the wider Council. As highlighted in my answer above, the County Council will continue to use its involvement with the bodies and organisations that have the responsibilities for coastal matters in Norfolk, ie Defra, the Environment Agency, Coastal Partnerships East and Great Yarmouth Brough Council, to help influence and secure the best possible outcomes.

7.15 Question from Cllr Maxine Webb

The Cabinet Member for Children's Services recently confirmed that the Council could fill "twice over" the two new special schools announced to open in 2026. Will she therefore now look again at the County's Angel Road school and Dereham Children's centre sites as options for two further special schools, which could be redesigned and renovated to open as new specialist provision, potentially within months rather than years?

Response from the Cabinet Member for Children's Services

This is the 3rd time I have been asked this question within three subsequent Cabinet meetings and, due to the relative short timeframe between these questions being asked and the timeframe for capital decision making I do need to repeat my previous answer: '...as part of the process for any vacated property we consider the potential use of such assets for Children's Service. This will involve how this building could support our Local First Inclusion Programme and will therefore be considered as part of the SEND Sufficiency and Capital workstream'. I am not able to provide any further update currently. However, I believe all councillors are aware that SEND developments remain a priority for this council and that Officers continue to work hard to move these developments forward and I will be happy to provide an update when the next stage of the process has concluded....'. For the avoidance of doubt, I do not want my response to be interpreted as not taking the suggestion seriously but instead to be evidence of quite rightly following a process that guarantees the right decision is achieved for the long-term benefit of the county. On a point of fact, the lease for Angel Road is still not yet transferred to the council and, therefore, this will be the next stage in the process.

Second question from Cllr Maxine Webb

Norfolk is not on the list announced this week, of local authorities set to receive a share of the £40m hardship fund to help fund teachers' well-earned pay rises. What impact does the Cabinet Member for Children's Services think this latest example of the government letting down our schools will have, especially on overstretched SEND provision, disproportionately affected due to the higher staffing levels needed?

Response from the Cabinet Member for Children's Services

The reason why Norfolk was not included in the list announced to receive a share of the 40m hardship fund is because Norfolk is not eligible for this particular pot of funding.

The £40m, referred to as the hardship fund, is a fund to support those schools facing the greatest financial challenges. £20m of this funding will go to only those local authorities who have the most significant school deficits (in effect aggregated school level deficits which represent 1% of their total maintained schools' income, which is not relevant to Norfolk) and the remaining 20m will be used to expand the existing route for academies in financial difficulties, in line with existing criteria and processes.

7.16 Question from Cllr Mike Smith-Clare

The Cabinet Member for Children's Services said if she didn't get a positive answer to hers and the Leaders letter to the Secretary of State for Education reinstating the £5.6m taken from Norfolk schools she would go to London to see her. When is her appointment?

Response from the Cabinet Member for Children's Services

I thank Cllr Mike Smith Clare for his question. He well knows, I wrote to the Minister of State (Minister of State for Schools) The Rt Hon Nick Gibb, MP on 11 October 2023, promptly after the announcement was made of the accountancy error by the DFE. Whilst I remain waiting for a response, I have also written to the Secretary of State for Education the Rt Hon Gillian Keegan, MP on 27 October 2023 jointly with Sir Brandon Lewis MP. We have requested to meet face to face to discuss this issue, with an expectation that the financial gap of 5.6m is honoured. I note that my fellow councillor in his comments in the EDP on the 2nd of November considers this to be a hollow gesture, I beg to differ!

7.17	<p>Question from Cllr Julie Brociek-Coulton Care workers looking for parking spaces because they don't have permits waste a lot of time that the County Council is paying for that should be time spent caring for the needs of vulnerable people. How much time does the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Services calculate that comes to at what cost?</p> <p>Response from the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care Thank you for your question.</p> <p>The hourly rate that the Council pays for Home Care includes an element that covers travel time and associated costs such as mileage.</p> <p>Question from Cllr Julie Brociek-Coulton If those figures are not available, will she commission research to establish that information and join me on calling for parking permits for care workers like those schemes in some other Councils?</p> <p>Response from the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care I refer you to my answer to the question above, the hourly rate that the Council pays for Home Care includes an element that covers travel time and associated costs such as mileage.</p>
7.18	<p>Question from Cllr Chrissie Rumsby As money is so tight, would the Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste prefer to see available investment spent on new roads or measures to alleviate flooding?</p> <p>Response from the Cabinet Member for This should not be an either/or question, because our role as a County Council is to continually balance our priorities and focus the use of our resources in the best ways possible. Consequently, the County Council will continue to do that in relation to both of these service areas and across all other service areas too.</p> <p>In addition, the County Council will continue to explore opportunities to secure external funding where opportunities become available, and it has to be accepted that such funding often comes with restricted criteria about what the funding can be used for.</p>