

People and Communities Select Committee

Date: **15 March 2024**
Time: **10am**
Venue: **Council Chamber, County Hall, Norwich**

Advice for members of the public:

This meeting will be held in public and in person.

It will be live streamed on YouTube and, members of the public may watch remotely by clicking on the following link: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCdyUrFjYNPfPq5psa-LFIJA/videos?view=2&live_view=502

We also welcome attendance in person, but public seating is limited, so if you wish to attend please indicate in advance by emailing committees@norfolk.gov.uk

We have amended the previous guidance relating to respiratory infections to reflect current practice but we still ask everyone attending to maintain good hand and respiratory hygiene and, at times of high prevalence and in busy areas, please consider wearing a face covering.

Please stay at home if you are unwell, have tested positive for COVID 19, have symptoms of a respiratory infection or if you are a close contact of a positive COVID 19 case. This will help make the event safe for attendees and limit the transmission of respiratory infections including COVID-19.

Persons attending the meeting are requested to turn off mobile phones

Membership:

Cllr Fran Whymark (Chair)
Cllr Brian Long (Vice-Chair)

Cllr Sharon Blundell
Cllr Claire Bowes
Cllr Ed Connolly
Cllr John Crofts
Cllr Michael Dalby

Cllr Brenda Jones
Cllr Mark Kiddle-Morris
Cllr Julian Kirk
Cllr Paul Neale
Cllr Mike Smith-Clare

**For further details and general enquiries about this Agenda
please contact the Committee Officer:**

Hollie Adams on 01603 223029
or email committees@norfolk.gov.uk

Under the Council's protocol on the use of media equipment at meetings held in public, this meeting may be filmed, recorded or photographed. Anyone who wishes to do so must inform the Chairman and ensure that it is done in a manner clearly visible to anyone present. The wishes of any individual not to be recorded or filmed must be appropriately respected.

A g e n d a

1 To receive apologies and details of any substitute members attending

2 Minutes

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To agree the minutes of the meeting held on 19 January 2024

3 Members to Declare any Interests

If you have a **Disclosable Pecuniary Interest** in a matter to be considered at the meeting and that interest is on your Register of Interests you must not speak or vote on the matter.

If you have a **Disclosable Pecuniary Interest** in a matter to be considered at the meeting and that interest is not on your Register of Interests you must declare that interest at the meeting and not speak or vote on the matter

In either case you may remain in the room where the meeting is taking place. If you consider that it would be inappropriate in the circumstances to remain in the room, you may leave the room while the matter is dealt with.

If you do not have a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest you may nevertheless have an **Other Interest** in a matter to be discussed if it affects, to a greater extent than others in your division

- Your wellbeing or financial position, or
- that of your family or close friends
- Any body -
 - Exercising functions of a public nature.
 - Directed to charitable purposes; or
 - One of whose principal purposes includes the influence of public opinion or policy (including any political party or trade union);

Of which you are in a position of general control or management.

If that is the case then you must declare such an interest but can speak and vote on the matter.

4 To receive any items of business which the Chairman decides should be considered as a matter of urgency

5 Public Question Time

Fifteen minutes for questions from members of the public of which due notice has been given. Please note that all questions must be received by the Committee Team (committees@norfolk.gov.uk) by **5pm Monday 11 March 2024**.

For guidance on submitting a public question, please visit <https://www.norfolk.gov.uk/what-we-do-and-how-we-work/councillors-meetings-decisions-and-elections/committees-agendas-and-recent-decisions/ask-a-question-to-a-committee>

6 Local Member Issues/Questions

Fifteen minutes for local member to raise issues of concern of which due notice has been given. Please note that all questions must be received by the Committee Team (committees@norfolk.gov.uk) by **5pm Monday 11 March 2024**.

7 Home to School Travel

Report by the Executive Director of Children's Services

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8 Fostering Transformation Update

Report by the Executive Director of Children's Services

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9 Forward Work Programme

Report by the Interim Executive Director of Adult Social Services

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People and Communities Select Committee
Minutes of the Meeting Held on 19 January 2024 at 10am
in the Council Chamber, County Hall

Present:

Cllr Fran Whymark (Chair)
Cllr Sharon Blundell
Cllr Ed Connolly
Cllr John Crofts
Cllr Brenda Jones
Cllr Paul Neale

Substitutes Present:

Cllr Michael Chenery of Horsbrugh for Cllr Michael Dalby
Cllr Phillip Duigan for Cllr Julian Kirk
Cllr Chrissie Rumsby for Cllr Mike Smith Clare

Officers Present:

Hollie Adams	Committee Officer
Geoff Connell	Director of IMT & Chief Digital Officer
Sophie Leney	Head of Trading Standards
Ciceley Scarborough	Acting consultant in Public Health
Chris Scott	Assistant Director - Community Commissioning, Adult Social Services
Diane Steiner	Deputy Director of Public Health
Sarah Rank	Head of Digital Business Partnering

1. Apologies for Absence

1.1 Apologies were received from Cllr Claire Bowes, Cllr Michael Dalby (Cllr Michael Chenery substituting), Cllr Julian Kirk (Cllr Phillip Duigan substituting), Cllr Brian Long (Vice-Chair), and Cllr Mike Smith-Clare (Cllr Chrissie Rumsby substituting).

2. Minutes of last meeting

2.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 17 November 2023 were agreed as an accurate record and signed by the Chair.

3. Declarations of Interest

3.1 There were no declarations of interest made.

4. Items received as urgent business

4.1 There were no items of urgent business.

5. Public Questions

X.1 No public questions were received.

6. Member Questions and Issues

No Member questions were received.

7. Listening and engaging to refresh our Adult Social Services Promoting Independence Strategy

7.1.1 The Select Committee received the report giving information on the progress of Promoting Independence to date, and setting out how feedback would be gained from residents and used to update the strategy.

7.1.2 The Assistant Director of Community Commissioning introduced the report to the Select Committee:

- The aim of Promoting Independence was prevention and keeping people independent for longer.
- A public engagement exercise had been carried out and the level of response was shown in appendix 1 of the report. Most responses received were from British, white women. A quarter of respondents had disabilities and half were from people aged 55-57.
- Appendix 2 of the report showed a summary of feedback received from engagement. Key points were that people sometimes felt information could be difficult to find and so information in different formats would be beneficial. Residents wanted to be able to access support as early as possible and for the Council to be consistent in the way it communicated with people. People with sensory disabilities wanted more support accessing information.
- Coproduction and engagement would continue to be a priority to gain feedback and help people understand the difference their feedback had made.
- The updated draft of the Promoting Independence Strategy showed what people wanted from Adult Social Services.
- Information and advice would be updated to be user friendly and accessible so people could find options and services available and contact Adult Social Services for support.

7.2 The following points were discussed and noted:

- The narrow age group of respondents to the survey was noted; The Assistant Director of Community Commissioning was unsure of the reason for this.
- A Committee Member asked whether people's difficulties getting GP appointments would impact on this strategy and people's care. The Assistant Director of Community Commissioning replied that there were examples of both good and poorer care in Norfolk. The Care Quality programme would help with this, and he encouraged people to get in touch with Adult Social Services if they were not receiving the quality of care that they expected.
- In response to a question the Assistant Director of Community Commissioning agreed that as people's needs became more complicated, and more than one agency was involved, there needed to be better coordination. Community support was valued and Norfolk County Council was represented at Health and Wellbeing Board partnership boards to ensure that community support was effective.
- A Committee Member raised concerns voiced by members of the public about the possible reduction of Minimum Income Guarantee. She asked what communication had been held with people in receipt of Minimum

Income Guarantee and their carers and whether a decision had been made to either keep Minimum Income Guarantee at the same rate or reduce it. The Assistant Director of Community Commissioning replied that he was unable to confirm specific information about Minimum Income Guarantee as this was not in his remit, however, when making changes officers would look at what consultations and conversations were needed with service users and the public.

- The expected high amount of population growth in the older age group and the impact on the adult social care sector was raised. The Assistant Director of Community Commissioning replied that having a clear workforce strategy in place was key to ensure the right workforce capacity and capability.
- A Committee Member asked how mental health support would be provided for carers. The Assistant Director of Community Commissioning **agreed** to bring a written response on support available to support mental health of carers.
- It was confirmed that InTran could provide translations of documents as well as easy read versions of documents, and sign language videos to help people access information where needed.
- Cllr John Crofts arrived at 10:15
- The support in place for older carers was queried. It was discussed that a system response was needed to support carers, across GP services, Adult Social Services front door and other services in the community. It was important for everyone to work towards a common aim of the role of the GP in support for carers.
- It was **suggested** that a report on support for carers, including Carers Matters Norfolk and support across the whole system, could be brought to a future Committee meeting. The Chair **agreed** with this suggestion.
- A Committee Member felt that some of the wording set out in the strategy was the same as in previous ones. The Assistant Director of Community Commissioning pointed out that the Promoting Independence Strategy had been produced over 5 years, and this report presented a refresh of the strategy. Feedback showed that the strategy was on track.
- A Committee Member asked about the support in place for young carers. It was confirmed that the department would work with Children's Services to ensure support was in place.
- The department would work with primary care to make sure they put steps in place to talk with people and find out if they had a caring responsibility. The Assistant Director of Community Commissioning **agreed** to take away a conversation about whether an ID badge for carers was possible.
- The Chair felt that the Integrated Care System could help progress things by improved joint working and that communication was an important aspect to this strategy.

7.3 The Select Committee **NOTED** the feedback from the public engagement activity called Conversations Matter and the supporting draft strategy. The Select Committee **highlighted** the importance of communication and working together with our partners.

8. Adult Social Services digital strategy

8.1.1 The Select Committee received the draft report setting out the Adult Social Care Digital Strategy for 2024/25.

8.1.2 The Head of Digital Business Partnering gave a presentation, shown in an appendix to the report:

- The council had RAG (Red Amber Green) rated itself against the areas set out in the “What Good Looks Like” framework to help support improvement.
- In prevention and early help, targeted intervention had been carried out with district councils. This work would help the department see what work could be done to impact on loneliness and early intervention.
- Funding had been received from the CCG (Clinical Commissioning Group) to purchase Alcove Devices for the Virtual Care Agency, and piloted with people who could not attend day centres. The Alcove Device was a tablet with a video phone and acted as a digital device for people with low or no digital skills. It could be used to help with medication prompts or wellness checks via video calls. There had been further investment in this service via a three-year contract following success of the pilot.
- Norfolk County Council was a leader in the country in some areas of its digital strategy.
- Assistive technology achieved the biggest savings out of the original offer, and this was being reviewed.
- The council was preparing people for the digital switchover in 2025.
- Funding had been received to fund digital coaches. On 8 January 2024 these coaches had seen 2981 people compared to the target of them seeing 1000 people by March 2024.
- The shared care record would enable people to tell their story once and save time for staff to care for people.

8.2 The following points were discussed and noted:

- A Committee Member asked whether internet speed restricted who could receive a visit from services. The Director of IMT & Chief Digital Officer replied that 97% of people in Norfolk now had access to super-fast broadband, and the Council had been successful in getting £114m funding for Gigabit broadband access to non-commercially viable areas. This would leave around 1% of households in Norfolk unable to access broadband.
- The withdrawal of copper wire telephony was discussed, and that residents would need to use broadband for phone line access after this. The Committee discussed that broadband companies should be asked to provide discounts for people on lower incomes and older people; the Council had discussed this with companies. The safety implications of this change in phone line access were discussed, namely, the risk of phones connected via broadband losing power during a power cut. This would mean that people would need to have a mobile phone available in the event of a power cut to call emergency services; there were therefore safety implications for homes without a mobile phone or with poor phone signal.
- A Committee Member asked officers about Lorenzo; Officers replied that it contained good quality information. The shared care record now connected to the mental health trust information on Lorenzo. The shared care record allowed Social Workers to access information held by the Council, GPs and other organisations and now the mental health trust.
- A discussion was held about the withdrawal of 3G. The 3G network would be re-used for 4G. The Director of IMT & Chief Digital Officer would meet with network operators to see what would be done for areas which could not currently access 4G. It was also noted that some older people had mobile

phones which were not compatible with 4G. People with these phones would either need to upgrade to a new phone or discuss with their network.

- Withdrawal of 3G was industry led and the Council was challenging them to do as much as possible but the Council also had a duty of care, and the next Your Norfolk magazine would have information on this, as well as on Assistive Technology and removal of the PSTN (public switched telephone network) removal.
- The progress being made in AI (artificial intelligence) was noted, but the importance of human logic to override errors was pointed out.
- Officers challenged the comments made in the press about issues with Oracle by stating that the majority of Norfolk County Council staff were paid on time each month and that more people were paid correctly using Oracle than at any other time in the past.
- The positive aspects of face-to-face communication were noted as important, and that this strategy would enhance this.
- The Chair was pleased with the innovations set out in the report and that Norfolk was a system leader in many areas. He stressed the importance of ensuring that people understand the full implications of the copper wire switch off.

8.3 The Select Committee:

- a) Considered the Adults Strategy and fed-back:
 - The importance of ensuring people understand the full implications of the copper wire switch off, via mobile network providers and NCC communications team.
- b) Reviewed the work under this programme, recognising that NCC is seen as a system leader for the innovative work being undertaken.

9. Norfolk's approach to vaping

9.1.1 The Select Committee received the report setting out a range of system-wide and targeted activities which would be delivered in partnership with Trading Standards, Childrens' Services, members of the Norfolk Tobacco Control and Vaping Alliance, and the Children and Young People Strategic Alliance, aligned to both the Flourish and the Norfolk Tobacco Control Strategy.

9.1.2 The Acting Consultant in Public Health and the Head of Trading Standards gave a presentation, set out in the appendix to the report:

- Legislation had been changed with an aim to introduce a smoke free generation. Selling tobacco to anyone aged 14 was now illegal and this would increase by one year of age each year.
- Data showed that 40,000 adults in Norfolk used e-cigarettes (vapes) daily. Vapes could be a good tool for people to give up smoking. 13.2% of adults in Norfolk smoked. There was a target to reduce this to 5%.
- The increase in incidence of vaping was highest in the 16-24 age group.
- Trading Standards work around vaping included ensuring that vapes sold in Norfolk were safe, and working with companies to ensure they were selling vapes from reputable suppliers. Underage sales test purchasing was carried out as well.
- A toolkit had been sent to school leaders and teachers in 2023 providing information on talking to children about vaping.

- An anonymous FLOURISH survey had been sent to children which included questions on vaping. The results were due at the end of 2024.

9.2 The following points were discussed and noted:

- It was noted that some people believed vaping was safe, however it was the case that vaping was safer than smoking for those who already smoked.
- Concerns were raised about people buying vapes online and the safety of these, and what work was being done with online retailers. The Head of Trading Standards replied that there was a national e-crimes unit in place to support in this area. If people had concerns, they should report the website in question to Trading Standards.
- Cllr Ed Connolly left the meeting at 11:52
- There were hopes that in the future there would be a move towards vapes being sold in dull packaging in similar way to tobacco to make it less attractive to non-smokers.
- At this time the long-term health risks of vaping were unknown. A Committee Member asked when the risks would be known. The Acting Consultant in Public Health replied that there was no longitudinal research on this, but research had been carried out comparing smoking and vaping which showed vaping was safer. Work was being carried out looking at new evidence coming forward and the Council had tendered for a new stop smoking service provider which included provision for services to help people stop vaping.
- A query was raised around availability of traditional nicotine patches. The Acting Consultant in Public Health replied that nicotine was an addictive substance, and it was important to have choice for people; nicotine replacement therapy was still available but some types had been withdrawn from the market.
- A Committee Member felt that if vapes tasted like tobacco, they would be less likely to attract non-smokers. Officers replied that there had been a consultation on how vaping could be made less attractive to non-smokers such as by reducing flavours, ingredients and marketing.
- The Head of Trading Standards confirmed that legislation set out that it was illegal for retailers to sell vapes to under 18's but did not set out that it was illegal for under 18's to buy them.
- A Committee Member discussed that many people smoked, drank or took other substances to help them feel better in difficult times, and asked if this should be an area of higher focus. The Acting Consultant in Public Health replied that there was limited evidence of the reasons why young people vaped, and the Flourish survey would be important to find this out.
- Officers confirmed that it was cheaper to vape than smoke per amount of nicotine. Consultation discussion had been held about whether an increase in the cost of vaping would disincentivise young people from vaping.
- The Chair noted that a multi-agency approach was important in this area both in Norfolk and nationally to recognise what could be done. He suggested that the Committee recommend to cabinet that they put pressure on Government to bring forward the legislation changes needed.

9.3 The Select Committee:

1. Noted the contents of the report.
2. Endorsed the proposals made in the report by public health.

3. Recommended that Cabinet put pressure on Government to bring about the proposed legislation designed to prevent children and young people from starting vaping.

10. Forward Work Programme

- 10.1 The Select Committee received and reviewed the forward work programme.
- 10.2 Cllr Brenda Jones suggested a task and finish group be set up looking into the impact of poor oral health and setting up a programme encouraging good oral health. The Deputy Director of Public Health replied that there was work ongoing looking into oral health; she agreed to find out what campaigns were ongoing and **suggested** bringing a report to a future meeting on oral health across all age groups.
- 10.3 Cllr Chrissie Rumsby asked for a report on malnutrition and its implications on public health. The Chair **agreed** to see if this was most appropriate to bring to People and Communities Select Committee or Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- 10.4 The Select Committee agreed the forward plan with the addition of:
 - A report to a future meeting on oral health across all age groups.
 - A possible report on malnutrition and its implications on public health following review on whether this report was best suited to People and Communities Select Committee or Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The Meeting Closed at 12:17

**Cllr Fran Whyman, Chairman,
People and Communities Select Committee**



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People and Communities Select Committee

Item No: 7

Report Title: Home to School Travel

Date of Meeting: 15th March 2024

Responsible Cabinet Member: Cllr Penny Carpenter (Cabinet Member for Children's Services)

Responsible Director: Sara Tough, Executive Director: Children's Services

Executive Summary

This report provides an overview of the current arrangements for delivery of home to school travel (HTST) which transports around 18,000 eligible children and young people to and from school each day. It highlights the current pressures on the system and outlines the actions and initiatives that the council is taking to improve outcomes, manage demand, reduce costs, and ensure compliance with statutory duties and best practice.

HTST is a statutory duty for the local authority to provide free travel for eligible children aged 5-16 to their nearest suitable school. The eligibility criteria are based on age, distance, safety, disability, and low income. The cost of HTST has been rising consistently over several years, both in Norfolk and nationally, due to a range of factors such as pupil numbers, special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), inflation, supply challenges, and rurality.

In 2023/24, the projected overspend for HTST is £6.1 million, driven by higher costs per child, especially for SEND transport. The average cost per child has increased by 20% from the previous year, and the cost per mile has increased by 20p. The HTST programme, which started in 2020, aims to ensure all children can access the appropriate education and travel safely whilst achieving the best value for money in the provision of HTST. There is also a particular focus on supporting pupils to travel independently or in an as inclusive a way as possible. The programme has delivered savings of £1.2 million in 2022/23 and is projected to deliver further substantial financial benefits in future years whilst still meeting needs.

Action Required

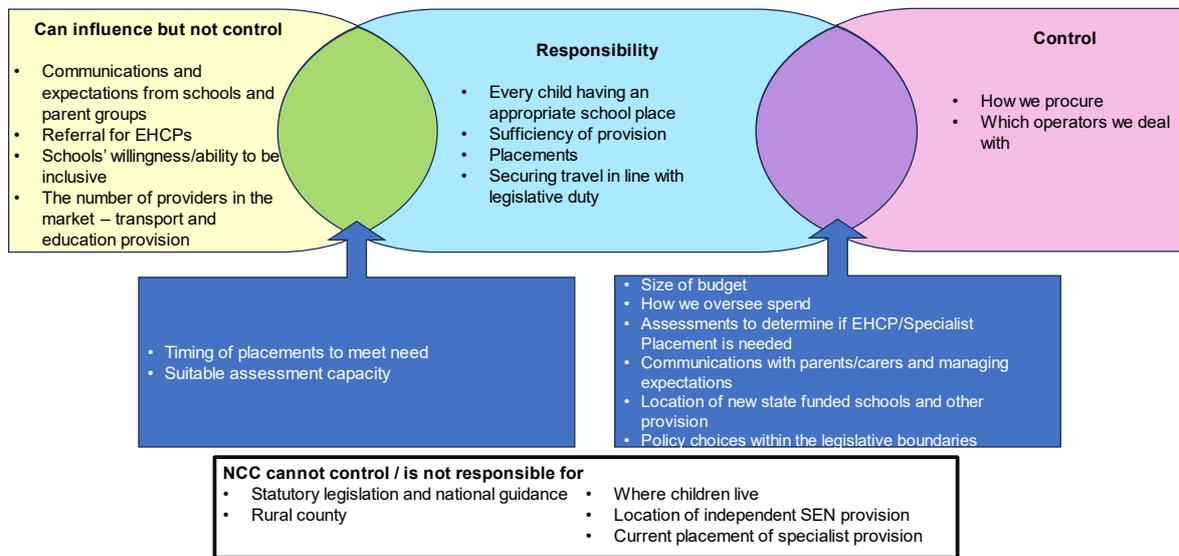
The Select Committee is asked to:

1. Note and discuss the content of the report on Norfolk's Home to School Travel (HTST)
2. Provide feedback and comments on the HTST programme of transformation and improvement.
3. Identify any areas for further scrutiny or investigation.

1. Background and Context

- 1.1 Home to school travel (HTST) is a statutory duty for the local authority to provide free travel for eligible children aged 5-16 to their nearest suitable school. Eligibility is based on various criteria, such as age, distance, safety, special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and low income. The local authority has a duty to publish their school travel policy on their website and keep it under regular review to ensure it continues to meet local needs and complies with statutory requirements. The LA (Local Authority) must also promote sustainable travel to school, promote independence for children with SEND, and publish an annual transport policy statement for post-16 students.
- 1.2 HTST is delivered through a combination of public transport, buses, coaches, and smaller vehicles. We also offer alternative travel options which can suit the needs of young people and their families. The service covers the third largest geographical area in the country, with an average distance travelled per student of over 13 miles. The service works closely with schools, parents, carers and transport providers to ensure the safety, wellbeing and educational attainment of the children and young people who use it
- 1.3 The HTST provision faces significant challenges and pressures, both in Norfolk and nationally. The cost of HTST has been rising consistently over several years, driven by factors such as increasing pupil numbers, increasing SEND needs, inflation, supply shortages, and rurality. The council has a budget of £55.6 million for HTST in 2023/24, but the projected spend is £61.7 million, resulting in a pressure of £6.1 million. Similar pressures have been seen over several years and are replicated nationally in most local areas.
- 1.4 The council has been undertaking a programme of transformation and improvement for HTST since 2020, focusing on the areas where we have control or influence. As illustrated in the diagram below there are many aspects of this agenda which are beyond our control, including the statutory policy framework, the behaviour of schools, parental preferences, the providers in the market and much of the cost base. However, there are still many aspects where we can make a real difference either through direct action or by influencing the key stakeholders in the market and education system.

Our Control and Influence: Home to school travel



1.5 The purpose of this report is to provide the Select Committee with a balanced overview of the current issues and pressures facing HTST provision, and the actions and initiatives that the council is taking to manage demand, reduce costs, improve outcomes, and ensure compliance with statutory duties and best practice. The report also aims to identify the future opportunities and challenges for HTST, and to seek feedback and comments from the Select Committee on the HTST programme of transformation and improvement.

2. Market Providers in Norfolk

2.0 We currently transport students in the following ways:

- 4,257 on public transport (mostly buses but also train)
- 8,015 on buses and coaches over 30 seats
- 1,551 on minibuses 10 -16 seats
- 3,362 on smaller vehicles
- 787 by giving a mileage allowance to the family.

Taxi/small vehicle model – smaller vehicles are licensed as taxis, because they have to be by law, but are not taxis in the true sense of the word in that many of them don't do any work other than school transport contracts. This means that all costs of the vehicle and driver have to be allocated to the school contract.

Norse the linked arms-length company of the county council. They operate 49 contracts using approx. 97 vehicles into special schools across Norfolk and 4 contracts into mainstream schools.

Norse specialise in the bigger minibuses (9-16 seats) and those that are wheelchair accessible. They also operate some smaller vehicles (less than 9 seats) under a taxi licence. The majority of their SEN routes will also have a passenger assistant.

2.1 **Contract lengths** are usually 5 years with an option to extend up to 8 years. This encourages suppliers to invest and allows for continuity of service to children but allows us to revisit the market and consider factors such as change of school hours, pupil numbers, new entrants to the market.

2.2 **Suppliers** range from large bus companies (e.g. First) to small one-man band taxi operators.

Nearly 70% of the operators we use have fewer than 10 employees. Supply is spread across the county but there are areas where there are gaps in the market e.g. Thetford, Fakenham. There are other areas where competition is limited e.g. Kings Lynn.

2.4 **Prices** have been increasing steadily since the pandemic for several reasons:

- **Shortage of drivers**, making recruitment and retention hard and leading to operators having to offer more money (this is a national problem)
- Increases in the **national minimum wage** (increased since April 2017 from £7.50/hour to £10.42/hour now – an increase of 38.9% - and increasing again to £11.44/hour this year)
- **Reduced coach market supply** – the coach industry suffered a lot during the pandemic and at least 3 coach operators have since closed in Norfolk.
- **Fuel prices** are still fluctuating leading to operator nervousness on pricing.
- There are specific areas in Norfolk where supply of certain types of vehicles are more limited, e.g. Thetford.

3. Proposal and Programme Scope

3.1 The aim of the transformation programme is to manage spend, support pupils to move to independence, and ensure compliance with statutory duties and best practice. The programme has delivered several initiatives and interventions, such as:

- **TITAN Travel Training:** (Travel Independence Training across Norfolk) offers young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) support to help them to become confident independent travellers. We provide schools with our Ready To Go! Programme to embed foundation skills and ongoing support through our 1 to 1 training service, TITAN +, tailored to the young person's needs.
TITAN travel independence training has shown to have positive effects on the lives of the young people trained, as well as those around them. Successful travel training helps to:
 - Develop life skills so young people can become more independent, increasing confidence and self-esteem.

- Increase interaction with other young people of the same age, building important social skills.
- Open more opportunities, such as greater access to education, training, jobs, volunteering, leisure, and social activities.
- Build confidence about going to a new school or college.
- Provide greater freedom so young people can be less reliant on their parents and carers to take them places.

Since 2021 the TITAN+ Travel programme has supported 389 young people with 1 to 1 training to enable them to travel independently, reducing the need for more bespoke forms of transport.

- **Personalised Travel Scheme:** Offers a sum of money, based on costs per mile, to parents and carers with a child or young person who has Special Educational Needs or Disabilities (SEND) to enable them to make their own arrangements to take their child or young person to and from school.

The scheme offers increased flexibility by allowing families in a variety of circumstances to organise whatever travel option works for them. Families can benefit from pick up and drop off times so the child or young person can attend after-school clubs or college timetables. By taking their child to and from school, parents and carers can spend more time with their child and can feel more involved or included in their school community, for example speaking with other parents and carers and school staff at the start and end of the school day. Parents and carers know their child's needs best and can support them, so they arrive at school more ready to learn.

The scheme also offers up to £500 should the family incur unforeseen travel costs.

- **Enhanced Oversight:** ensuring that there is a strong focus on looking to support inclusion in the initial discussions about transport options for each child and exploring alternative options to individual specialist transport requests, as a result fewer new individual packages are agreed. This promotes independence and inclusion, and a child can enjoy all the benefit of travelling with their peers and other children.
- **Route Reviews:** this is ongoing recommissioning work whereby the transport team seek to achieve contract efficiencies by re-commission each transport route and realigning routes where there are changes to children's requirements, school changes and new entrants to the market. This can optimise contracts to achieve efficiency and better value for money.
- **Policy and Process Review:** As and when Government guidance is updated or changed, we need to make sure our local policies and processes are aligned with the legislative framework and the council's strategic objectives.

- **Engagement and Communication:** by improving the information and guidance for schools, parents, carers and young people on HTST we can work collectively to ensure our policies and processors are supporting our young people and children's needs as well as managing expectations about the offer. This means parents and carers can make informed decisions about their child's educational journey and schools can provide them with the correct information and guidance.
- **Local First Inclusion:** These specific transport initiatives link into and are underpinned by our wider strategy to support children with SEN known as Local First Inclusion.

The **Local First Inclusion** programme is all about improving outcomes for children and young people with SEND ensuring, wherever possible and appropriate, they can attend school close to their home/in their community with the support they need to make progress in their learning alongside other children of the same age. Local First Inclusion is a six-year programme that has been agreed by the Secretary of State, securing DfE investment of £70m alongside NCC investment of c. £35m. This investment is aimed at ensuring we can collectively improve assessment, support, services and provision for children and young people with SEND whilst also achieving a balanced High Needs Block budget over the medium / long term.

This six-year programme is ambitious and complex across 80 projects and within 5 over-arching workstreams:

- Workstream 1 – Mainstream School Inclusion, Culture and Practice
- Workstream 2 – Early Help & Inclusion / School & Community Teams
- Workstream 3 – School Led Alternative Provision Models
- Workstream 4 – Commissioning/Using Independent Sector Differently
- Workstream 5 – SEND Sufficiency & Capital Delivery.

The dual benefits for children and young people and achieving a balanced High Needs Block budget apply equally to Home to School Travel. If successful, the focus on greater local mainstream inclusion and creating a greater density of specialist provision will reduce the number of children travelling to specialist placements and will achieve reduced travel time and travel costs for those that do need specialist places.

3.2 The proposal is to continue the programme of transformation and improvement for HTST, with a focus on the following areas:

- Increasing the supply and competition in the transport market, by engaging with existing and potential providers, reviewing the procurement, and

contracting arrangements, and exploring alternative ways to increase supply and workforce.

- Increasing the inclusion and independence of children and young people with SEND, by supporting them to access local and mainstream provision, providing travel training and personal travel schemes, and reviewing the HTST policies and processes.
- Increasing the efficiency and value for money of the transport routes and contracts, by using technology and data for route planning and optimisation, conducting regular route reviews and re-tendering, and benchmarking costs and performance
- Increasing engagement with schools, parents, carers, and young people, by providing clear and consistent information and guidance on HTST and the support available.

3.3 The proposal is also to monitor and evaluate the impact and outcomes of the programme of transformation and improvement for HTST, using a range of indicators and measures, such as:

- The total mileage and the total spend on HTST
- The number and proportion of children and young people who travel by different modes of transport, such as public transport, shared vehicles, individual vehicles, personal travel schemes, and independent travel.
- The average distance travelled and the average cost per student.
- The customer satisfaction and feedback from schools, parents, carers, and young people
- The compliance and performance of the transport providers and contracts
- The contribution and alignment of HTST to the council's strategic objectives and priorities

3.4 The proposal is also to report and update the Select Committee on the progress and performance of the programme of transformation and improvement for HTST, and to seek feedback and comments from the Select Committee on the HTST programme of transformation and improvement. Appendix 2 provides some details to this with current position.

4. Impact of the Proposal

4.1 The expected impact of the proposal is to improve overall efficiency of the HTST provision, and the following outcomes:

- Better value for money and sustainability for the council and the public, such as reduced costs, pressures, and carbon emissions
- Better compliance and best practice for the council and the transport providers, such as meeting the statutory duties, standards, and expectations.
- Better engagement and partnership with schools, parents, carers, and young people, such as increased involvement, satisfaction, and feedback

4.2 The HTST transformation programme has already achieved some positive outcomes and savings, such as:

- Reducing the percentage of individual taxi requirements, by seeking alternative options.
- Since 2021/22, 389 young people with SEND have been supported to become independent travers, reducing the need for specialist transport.
- Delivering 'in year' savings of £1.2 million in 2022/23 and predicted 'in year' savings of £1.3m in 2023/24. The resulting cumulative savings over the course of a child's educational life span are far greater.

4.3 However the programme also faces some challenges and risks, such as:

- The increasing complexity and diversity of the needs and preferences of children and young people with SEND and their families.
- The finite supply and therefore limited competition in the transport market, especially in some areas and for some types of vehicles
- The rising costs and inflationary pressures in the transport sector, such as fuel, wages, and licensing
- The uncertainty and volatility of both demand for HTST and supply of transport
- The potential changes and implications of the national and local policy and legislative developments, such as the Procurement Bill, the SEND Review, and the School Hours Reform

5. Evidence and Reasons for Decision

5.1 The evidence and reasons for the proposal are based on the following sources and factors:

- The legislative and policy framework for HTST, which sets out the council's statutory duties and responsibilities, as well as the national and local guidance and best practice
- The financial and operational performance of HTST, which shows the current and projected costs, pressures, and risks, as well as the achievements and challenges of the service
- The factors influencing the rising costs and demand for HTST, which include the increasing pupil numbers, increasing SEND needs, inflation, supply shortages, and rurality
- The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on HTST, which has added to the operational and financial difficulties, as well as the uncertainty and volatility of the transport market such as driver shortages
- The HTST programme of transformation and improvement, which outlines the actions and initiatives that the council is taking to manage demand, reduce costs, improve outcomes, and ensure compliance with statutory duties and best practice

- The future opportunities and challenges for HTST, which include the potential changes and implications of the national and local policy and legislative developments, as well as the emerging needs and preferences of children and young people and their families

6. Alternative Options

6.1 The alternative option is to maintain the status quo and not to continue the programme of transformation and improvement for HTST. This option would have the following implications:

- The HTST provision would not be able to meet the current and future needs and expectations of children and young people and their families, resulting in poor outcomes and experiences
- The HTST provision would not be able to cope with the increasing costs and demand pressures, resulting in unsustainable and unaffordable spending
- The HTST service would not be able to comply with the statutory duties and best practice, resulting in legal and reputational risks
- The HTST service would not be able to engage and partner with schools, parents, carers, and young people, resulting in low satisfaction and feedback
- The HTST service would not be able to align and integrate with the wider council's strategic objectives and priorities, resulting in missed opportunities and synergies

Therefore, this option is not recommended, as it would not achieve the desired outcomes and would have negative impacts on the HTST service, the council, and the children and young people who use it.

7. Financial Implications

7.1 HTST has a budget of £55.6 million for 2023/24, but the projected spend is £61.7 million resulting in a pressure of £6.1 million. This pressure is mainly due to the rising costs and demand for HTST, which are influenced by a range of factors, such as increasing pupil numbers, increasing SEND needs, inflation, supply shortages, and rurality.

7.2 The programme of transformation and improvement for HTST aims to reduce the costs and pressures on the HTST service, by managing demand, improving efficiency, and ensuring value for money. The programme has delivered savings of £1.2 million in 2022/23 and predicted to deliver £1.3 million in 2023/24. Elements of these savings will produce future savings as a child progresses through their education. Calculated over the last two years the savings are £3.7m. However, the savings may not be sufficient to offset the rising costs and demand, and there may be additional costs and risks associated with the implementation of the programme.

- 7.3 Childrens Services will need to continue to monitor and review the financial performance and projections, and to identify and implement further actions and initiatives to achieve a balanced and sustainable budget.

8. Resource Implications

- 8.1 **Staff:** There are no proposed changes to current staffing. Additional investment in staffing has been put in place previously as part of the programme, in particular to support the delivery of the TITAN independent travel training programme.
- 8.2 **Property:** The HTST provision does not have any direct property implications.
- 8.3 **IT:** The HTST service uses various IT systems and tools to support the planning, commissioning, delivery, and monitoring of the HTST service, such as the Synergy database, the Dynamic Purchasing System, the Keelvar optimiser tool, the Routewise database, and the Microsoft Office suite. The HTST service also uses the council's website and the My Norfolk account to provide information and guidance to schools, parents, carers, and young people, and to enable them to apply and manage their transport arrangements online. The HTST service will need to ensure that the IT systems and tools are fit for purpose and up to date, and to explore the potential for further digitalisation and innovation.

9. Other Implications

- 9.1 **Legal Implications:** The council has a statutory duty to provide free home to school transport to eligible children and young people aged between 5 and 16, to publish their HTST Policy on their website, comply with the legislative framework and the national and local guidance and best practice, and to keep abreast of any changes and developments that may affect the HTST service and the programme of transformation and improvement. The statutory framework and guidance around this provision is very detailed and specific and the Council has limited options for changing the approach.
- 9.2 **Human Rights Implications:** The council has a duty to respect and protect the human rights of children and young people who use HTST, as well as their families and the transport providers. The relevant human rights include the right to education, the right to respect for private and family life, the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, and the right to non-discrimination. The HTST service will need to ensure that it considers and balances the human rights of all parties involved in the HTST service and the programme of transformation and improvement, and to provide a fair and transparent process for decision-making and feedback.

9.3 Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) (this must be included):

This report asks elected members to agree to the continuation of an existing service with no proposed changes to current service delivery. There is no evidence to indicate that its continuation will have a disproportionate or detrimental impact on people with protected characteristics (such as older and younger people; men and women and people who identify as intersex or non-binary; disabled people; Black and Asian people or people from ethnically diverse backgrounds; people with different religions and beliefs; people who are as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender) compared to people who do not share these characteristics. Any subsequent changes to service delivery would be subject to an equality impact assessment prior to a decision being made about those changes.

9.4 Data Protection Impact Assessments (DPIA):

9.5 Health and Safety implications (where appropriate): None identified

9.6 Sustainability implications (where appropriate):

9.7 Any Other Implications:

10. Risk Implications / Assessment

10.1 HTST transformation programme does not achieve efficiencies required.

10.2 HTST transformation programme may lead to a change in provision for some families.

11. Recommendations

The Select Committee is asked to:

1. Note and discuss the content of the report on Norfolk's Home to School Travel (HTST)
2. Provide feedback and comments on the HTST programme of transformation and improvement.
3. Identify any areas for further scrutiny or investigation.

12. Background Papers

12.1 [Home to School travel Policy](#)

12.2 [Norfolk sustainable school travel strategy](#)

12.3 [Post16 transport policy](#)

12.4 [Travel to school for children of compulsory school age \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)

Officer Contact

If you have any questions about matters contained within this paper, please get in touch with:

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Telephone no.:

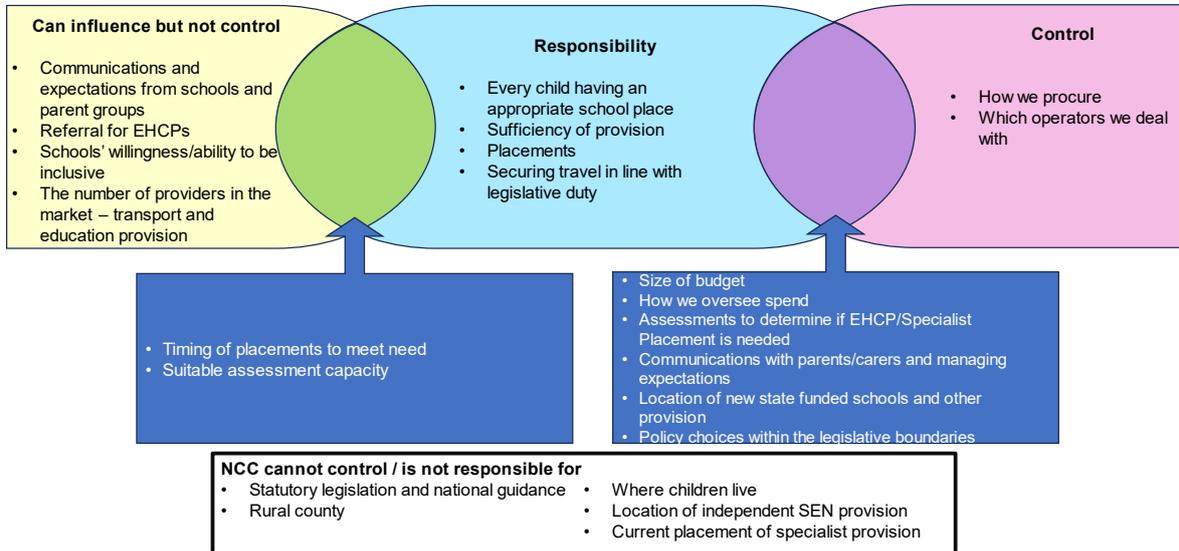
Email: james.wilson@norfolk.gov.uk



If you need this report in large print, audio, braille, alternative format or in a different language please contact 0344 800 8020 or 0344 800 8011 (textphone) and we will do our best to help.

Appendix 1

Our Control and Influence: Home to school travel



Appendix 2

Financial Pressures: 6-year view

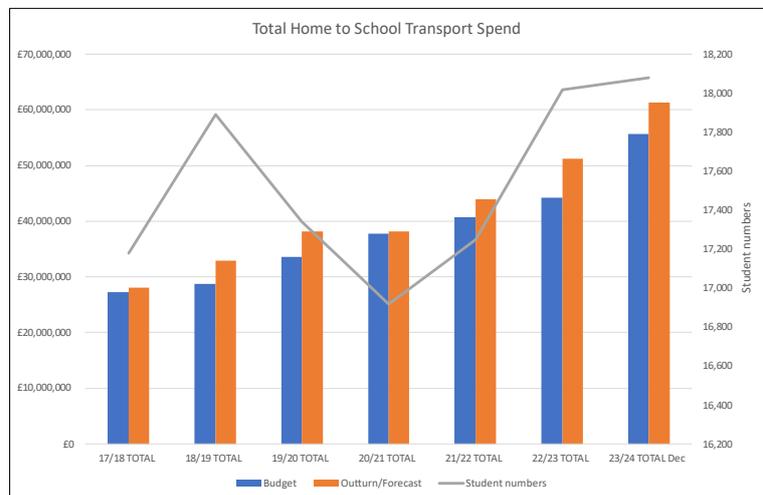


Over the last 6 years the **cost** of HTST has increased year-on-year between +8% to +16% (except for 20/21 Covid year)

23/24 predicts a steeper increase at 20% on the previous year



If we used the 21/22 to 22/23 outturn increase of +16% for setting this year's budget, then the budget would have been c. £59.4m



Financial Pressures: 6-year view

Financial Year	Budget, £m	Outturn/forecast	Over/(under)spend	Travel days per FY	Variance # Children yr-on-yr	Student numbers
17/18 TOTAL	£27.235	£28.069	£0.834	187	0	17,180
18/19 TOTAL	£28.737	£32.958	£4.220	190	712	17,892
19/20 TOTAL	£33.612	£38.122	£4.510	194	-551	17,341
20/21 TOTAL	£37.709	£38.234	£0.525	185	-424	16,917
21/22 TOTAL	£40.684	£43.941	£3.257	194	332	17,249
22/23 TOTAL	£44.180	£51.176	£6.996	189	767	18,016
23/24 TOTAL (P9)	£55.605	£61.337	£7.732	188	64	18,080



The average **cost per child** has increased year-on-year between 12% - 19% (except for 20/21 due to Covid); 23/24 forecast shows an increase of 19%



Between 18/19, 19/20, 20/21, 21/22 the increase in **costs per mile** were 7p – 8p per year. The rise has been steeper in the last 2 years; 22/23 saw an increase of 13p per mile, 23/24 has an increase of 20p per mile.

Financial Year	Budget Avg cost/child	Actual Avg cost/child	Total mileage in miles	Cost per mile £/mile	Average mile per child
17/18 TOTAL	£1,585	£1,634			
18/19 TOTAL	£1,606	£1,842	44,452,195	£0.74	2,484
19/20 TOTAL	£1,938	£2,198	46,515,312	£0.82	2,682
20/21 TOTAL	£2,229	£2,260	43,077,161	£0.89	2,546
21/22 TOTAL	£2,359	£2,547	45,760,725	£0.96	2,653
22/23 TOTAL	£2,452	£2,841	46,924,711	£1.09	2,605
23/24 TOTAL (P9)	£3,075	£3,393	47,441,269	£1.29	2,624

The cost per mile has almost doubled over the last 6 years.
Note: this distance is measured from the home to the school of each child, not by the route the vehicle would take

Appendix 3

Financial Overview

Budget Category	21/22 Budget £	21/22 Actual £	21/22 Overspend £	22/23 Budget £	22/23 Actual £	22/23 Overspend £	23/24 Budget £	23/24 Forecast £	23/24 Projected Overspend £
Mainstream	14,439,720	14,553,790	114,070	14,789,210	16,906,948	2,117,738	17,961,970	19,983,851	2,021,881
SEND	23,065,000	26,232,149	3,167,149	26,321,010	30,428,351	4,107,341	33,652,390	36,764,315	3,111,925
Post 16	701,210	901,422	200,212	722,500	936,106	213,606	934,470	837,885	-96,585
Post 16 SEND	2,477,830	2,253,238	-224,592	2,347,090	2,904,524	557,434	3,056,060	3,901,336	-845,276
Total	40,683,760	43,940,599	3,256,839	44,179,810	51,175,929	6,996,119	55,604,890	61,337,009	5,732,119

	Student Numbers	Miles	Miles per student	Student Numbers	Miles	Miles per student	Student Numbers	Miles	Miles per student
Mainstream	12,126	24,486,933	2019	13,157	24,589,271	1869	13,125	24,494,937	1866
SEND	3,029	15,178,588	5011	3,539	16,804,983	4749	3,621	16,883,661	4,663
Post 16	810	4,035,329	4982	926	3,351,611	3619	826	2,608,028	3,157
Post 16 SEND	362	2,059,874	5690	394	2,178,845	5530	508	3,454,642	6,800
Total Numbers	16,327	45,760,725	2803	18,016	46,924,711	2605	18,080	47,441,269	2624
Cost Per Student/per Mile	£2,691	£0.96		£2,841	£1.09		£3,415	£1.29	

There are 190 school days per academic year, but there can be some variance between financial years; 23 -24 forecast equivalent to c. £322k per school day

People and Communities Select Committee

Item No: 8

Report Title: Fostering Transformation Update

Date of Meeting: 15 March 2024

Responsible Cabinet Member: Cllr Carpenter (Cabinet Member for Children's Services)

Responsible Director: Sara Tough, Executive Director of Children's Services

1. Executive Summary

1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide a summary of the transformation work, including the work to date, to improve the recruitment and retention of foster carers for children in Norfolk who come into care, and in line with Children's Services aim that all children should experience family-based care.

1.2 In April 2023 a paper was presented explaining the strategic rationale for enhancing our approach to placement sufficiency. This was expanded on in an outline business case in September 2023. These papers set out a series of ideas designed to re-shape the way we provide care for our Looked after children, turning the tide on rising costs and providing better value of care through our broader sufficiency offer. A central pillar in the strategy is:

'An expansion of in-house fostering capacity through a whole-Council and whole County focus on foster carer recruitment and retention'

1.3 An increase in the number of foster carers across Norfolk will not only provide a more financially viable operating model, but all evidence indicates that family-based care secures the best outcomes for children. This is our purpose, and we must work hard to be the best corporate parent possible and create more opportunities to provide safe, supportive family environments where our children and young people can experience love and compassion to enable them to reach their aspirations. Therefore, to not take this approach would create a greater financial risk and create poorer outcomes for our looked after cohort. In recognition of the potential

improved outcomes a strong fostering offer could deliver, the April paper proposed that we make fostering a cooperate responsibly and priority benefiting from the full weight of Norfolk County Council driving it forward.

- 1.4 Alongside the local activity Norfolk has also been successful in securing a DfE bid to lead the Eastern Region in the implementation of a new regional Fostering Recruitment and Retention programme. This provides an excellent opportunity to increase the number of foster carers in Norfolk further and will complement the transformation activity already taking place within the Council.
- 1.5 To drive both the local cross council programme and the regional programme we have created two new governance structures, aligning where we need to, to ensure synergy and understanding but also de-coupling to allow greater mobilisation. We have recruited two new recruitment leads for Norfolk specifically to drive up recruitment performance, using intelligent data to better understand where the green shoots are and what yields the best results. We have also started to review our marketing campaign to ensure we are celebrating all that we offer within the fostering space.
- 1.6 Norfolk County Council is in unique market position and has a strength and depth of experience and knowledge in fostering, founded on public sector values and principles, that cannot be matched by external providers.
- 1.7 We need to celebrate these key attributes and make our community aware of our local fostering offer and recruit and retain far more carers who want to foster for the Local Authority, where we have much greater control on the quality and the cost, and ensuring children remain local to Norfolk.
- 1.8 The target with the culmination of the proposals is to increase the number of foster carers by up to 30 by the end of the project, improving outcomes for children and young people and delivering financial benefits of £4m-£7.5m.

Recommendations /Action Required

The Select Committee is asked to:

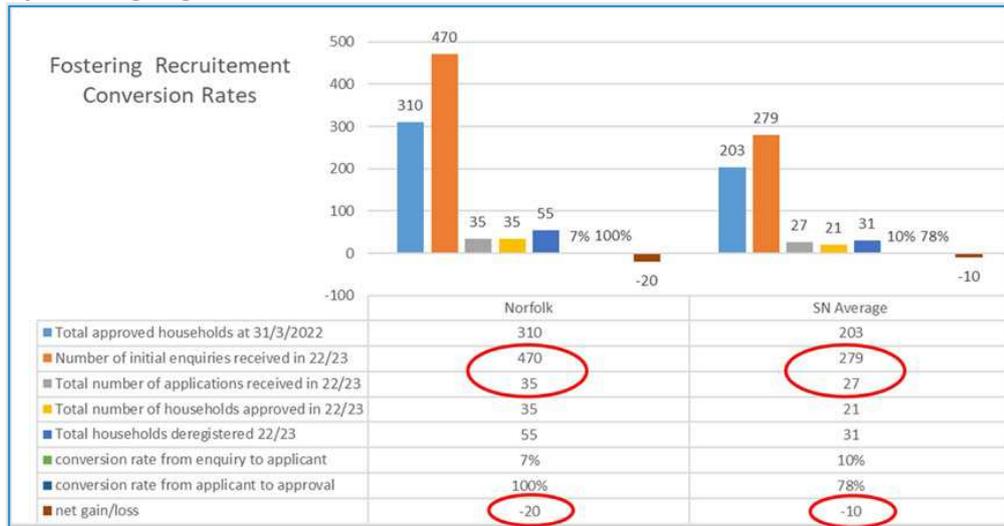
1. Review and provide feedback on the current work that Norfolk County Council is undertaking with regards to improving the offer to our foster carers and increase the net numbers of those who want to foster, and stay fostering, for our in-house service, Norfolk Fostering Service (NFS).

2. Consider the vital role members could play in promoting and supporting the drive to increase the pool of in-house foster carers.

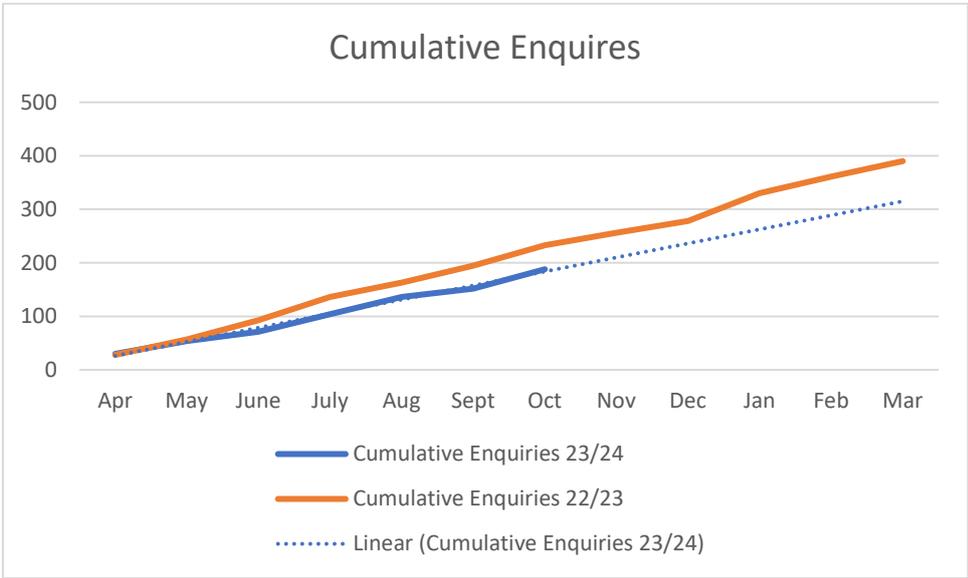
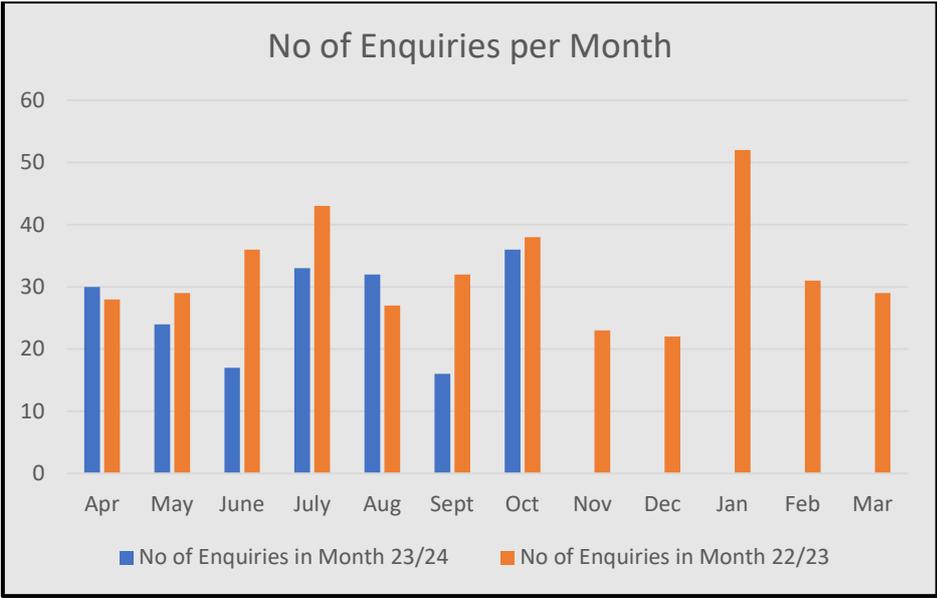
2. Purpose and Background:

- 2.1 As set out in the Executive Summary Norfolk County Council has committed to improve availability of foster carers in the County, to enable more looked after children and young people to remain in Norfolk and experience the support and stability they need within a family.
- 2.2 We want to create more capacity in both general and specialist placements and increase the effectiveness, competence, and confidence of our carers to prevent the number of placement breakdowns and admissions to residential care, as well as facilitate step-downs from care home and in some cases rehabilitation back to children's birth families.
- 2.3 It is important to set this ambition within the national context that highlights the challenges faced nationally in the recruitment and retention of foster carers and underpins the rationale locally for us to continue to transform our approach to fostering. There is a worsening picture nationwide in the sufficiency of foster placements, and this was highlighted in the National Children's Social Care Review (2022) and reflected in the subsequent Government strategy Stable Homes Built on Love (2023).
- 2.4 The number of mainstream fostering applications has fallen from 10,520 in 2018 to 8,280 in 2022, a 5% decrease. Of the 8,280 applications, 4,045 new foster homes were registered nationally. However, in March 2022 we saw 5,435 foster homes deregister giving and a net decrease in national capacity.
- 2.5 Locally we have seen similar challenges, where in the previous financial year, 2022/23, we have seen the number of in-house foster carers reduce

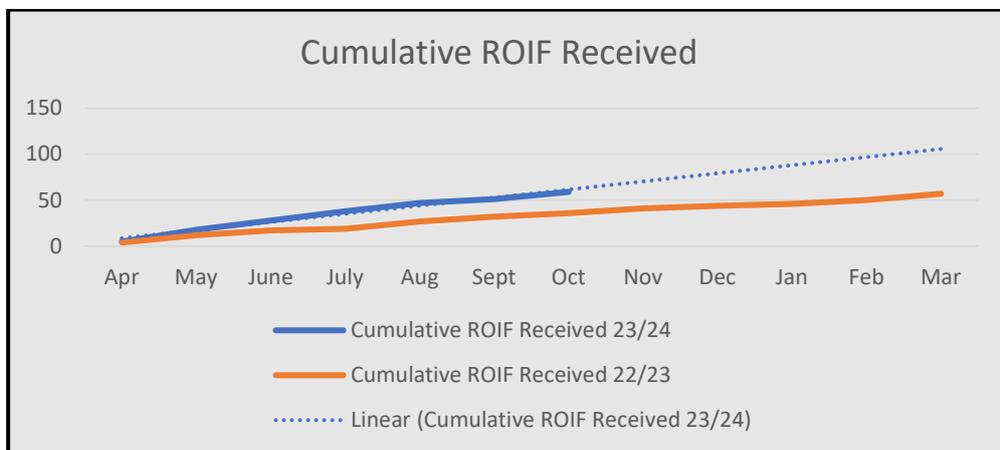
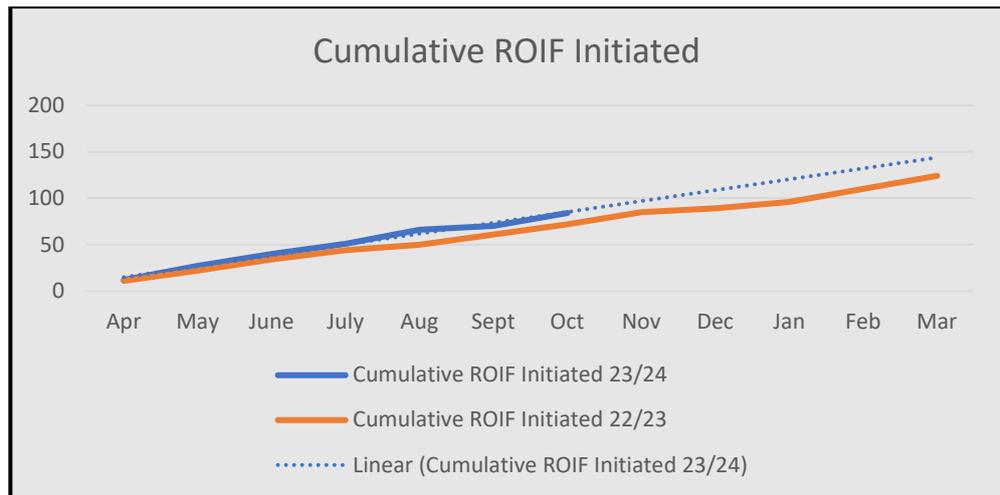
by 20, highlighted in the table below.



- 2.6 Looking at the data more closely reveals similar challenges for our Statistical Neighbours (SN), which is similar to the national position.
- 2.7 Specifically, Norfolk appears to be generating more enquiries than our SN, 470 vs 279, but converting less enquiries into successful applications. Of those enquiries we have a slightly higher number of households approved as a proportion of total approved households (11.2% vs 10.3%), indicating we are not an outlier in terms of approval rates.
- 2.8 In terms of de-registrations, we now routinely hold exit and ‘wobble’ interviews for those that are stating their intent to leave NFS, and this is giving us invaluable data regarding themes and areas in which we can improve our practice. Whilst we continue to see de-registrations however, there was a significant reduction in the number from 2022/23 where we had a net loss of 44 carers overall to a static position in 2023/24, We this then becomes a net gain position from 2024/25 onwards.
- 2.9 A key factor that will help to increase the number of foster carers is at the beginning of the process and relates to the number of enquiries received by NFS. The two graphs below highlight our 23/24 position when compared with 2022/23 and shows that in the first 7 months the number of enquiries are down by 19%. As highlighted earlier, whilst our enquiries appear high when compared against SNs, they are lower than the previous performance.



2.10 Building on the whole council approach, we have started to draw on wider resources to help analyse the performance data and understand the recruitment pipeline further. Using the Registration of Interest Forms (ROIF) data (see charts below), we can see an improvement in the figures for both those who have requested the form and those who then submit their application. We want to continue to build on this good news to recruit more in-house foster carers. To date, we have recruited more foster carers in 2023/24 (29 by end of March) compared to 14 foster carers in 2022/23.



2.11 As part of the planning to increase the number of foster carers, an important area of focus is retention. Specifically, when we examine the voluntary deregistration's in more detail, the predominant reasons cited are:

1. Retirement
2. Lack of wider support network
3. Lack of immediate overnight respite provision

2.12 Finally, continued understanding of the deregistration data is key to our ability to increase the overall net numbers of foster carers. If we can reduce those voluntarily leaving, then when we recruit new carers, we will increase the overall pool, rather than just replacing previous carers.

2.13 The data also helps to target our recruitment and engagement approaches, look at demographics for succession planning, and consider how we can use the experience of carers when they are considering

retirement to mentor and upskill new or less experienced carers, rather than leave fostering completely.

3. Proposal

Local Level

3.1 Taking into account the analysis shared and the opportunities this presents, the service has embarked on a truly ambitious programme of work – with ideas and resource coming from across the Council and the County. Key themes to support recruitment and retention include:

- **Community engagement and reach** ensuring fostering has a presence whenever the Council or Members go into or engage with the community
- **Working with our partners** in a wide variety of public, private and voluntary sector organisations to become 'foster friendly' and to actively seek to identify carers, with Norfolk due to be recognised as a foster friendly employee by February 2024
- **Developing an ambitious communication strategy** including use of the FLOURISH brand, as a Council and partnership, linking fostering to ensuring that all children in the County flourish
- **Commitment to a policy** of making the Council the most fostering friendly organisation in the Country
- **Reviewing reward, terms and conditions** that ensure that foster carers feel valued, fully supported, and justly recognised for the vital role they play.
- **Improving retention** in identifying what more we can do to support existing carers, including implementing the Mockingbird model that wraps intensive and specialist support around them to sustain caring, especially for children with the most complex needs
- **Recruiting a dedicated clinical support role**, a Resilience Practitioner, to offer enhanced support to temporarily approved Kinship Carers, and provided with clinical supervision
- **Continue leading and learning from regional recruitment approach** (Foster East) as part of the national pathfinder programme
- **Improve the functionality and accessibility of the foster carer portal**

3.2 The transformation activity described in the following section is being overseen by a Council-wide Steering Group comprising Executive Directors (as Chairs), Cabinet Members and Senior Leaders within Children's Services to provide effective governance, scrutiny, and challenge. This group oversees a dedicated project team, made up of different skills and experiences across the Council to drive the activity forward.

3.3 By using the Council's transformation methodology, the project team is taking an evidence based, user centred design approach to developing innovative foster care recruitment and retention strategies. Current work is focussed on;

- Building a robust evidence base to evaluate forthcoming prototypes, tests, and pilots, using a data-led analytical approach.
- Profiling the current cohort of foster carers and matching to other households within Norfolk to better focus and align marketing activity e.g. use of public libraries showing 'Any of Us' fostering advert.
- Engaging with foster carers and their supervising social workers
- Expanding community engagement work, including farming, faith communities and special schools, leveraging our existing relationship with them (unlike national IFAs)
- Conducting market analysis to evaluate alternative commissioning approaches to working with Independent Fostering Agencies
- Gaining support from private companies to advertise NFS
- Reviewing foster care allowances and benefits to produce a simpler, more attractive, and transparent offer.
- Further researching national good practice to strengthen our recruitment and retention approaches, learning from the best
- Creating Norfolk's version of Mockingbird, which is a tried and tested national model that improves foster carer retention.
- Providing additional support and resources for foster carers who care for children with disabilities and adolescents.
- Revamping the fostering website to make enquiries easier for prospective carers.
- Recruited two fostering recruitment leads whose role primarily focuses on:
 - building effective relationships with key external and internal contacts, including engaging the local communities to raise awareness of the foster carer role.
 - identifying and developing recruitment opportunities, by linking in with local and diverse communities
 - ensuring most cost-effective channel mix and maximizing digital channels by influencing the media agenda through proactive forward planning
 - being an advocate for digital engagement and social media by sharing expertise to build capacity across communications teams and the Council.
 - assessing the impact of campaigns across a range of measures, including output, outcome and return on investment.
 - managing and helping develop the cohort of fostering ambassadors as a channel to enhance the word-of-mouth recruitment of foster carers.
 - identifying a range of resources within local communities to stimulate retention of current fostering cohort.

- 3.4 As some of this work is investigative and experimental in nature, not all these activities will be impactful. However, via focused evaluation and review, projects can be ceased when not working and lessons learned and applied to the next phase of work.

Regional Level (Fostering Recruitment and Retention Programme funded by DfE for 24/25)

- 3.5 On Friday 15th December 2023 the government announced the following which relates to the Eastern Region activity Norfolk is leading:

'Foster care has also been bolstered today with an additional £8.5 million government investment. This takes the total investment in fostering across this parliament to £36 million, which is the largest ever investment in fostering in England. It will ensure there are more foster carers available by extending recruitment campaigns, simplifying recruitment processes, and providing better support for existing foster carers to even more local authorities.'

- 3.6 As appointed cluster lead for all 11 regional local authorities, Norfolk was successful in bidding to become a national fostering pathfinder to improve the recruitment and retention of foster carers.
- 3.7 The programme is designed to deliver end-to-end improvements that support boosting foster carer numbers across the region, including within Norfolk. The programme includes:
- a. **A recruitment support hub** to provide information about fostering and support alongside the assessment and approval process to maximise the number of people who take forward a fostering application;
 - b. **A marketing campaign** to attract new foster carers;
 - c. **Roll out of Mockingbird** - an evidence-based programme across the region to support retention;
- 3.8 This programme of works will integrate with and amplify the local activity to recruit and retain more foster carers in Norfolk and provide 1year proof of concept funding to assist new ways of working.
- 3.9 We envisage that the hub will supplement support given at a local level and provide a major boost in preventing the 'drop off' of interest along each stage of the application process, as well as offer a high level of support to newly approved foster carers.

4. Impact of the Proposal

- 4.1 The aim of all our activity is to increase the overall fostering capacity in Norfolk, mainstream and specialist (e.g. for children with disabilities), so children are able to experience family-based care that improves their outcomes. Impacts will include:
- increasing the availability, stability, and effectiveness of foster care placements that prevents placement breakdowns.
 - matching and placing children locally wherever possible
 - reducing admission to residential care
 - providing faster step downs for those in care homes and specialist treatment provision
 - enhancing the prospects of successful family reunification where viable
- 4.2 If the above can be achieved, not only will that deliver better outcomes, but it will be a far more financially sustainable model for the Council.
- 4.3 The target is to increase the net number of foster carers by up to 30 by the end of the project.

5. Evidence and Reasons for Decision

- 5.1 There is a national shortage of foster carers, and we know that family-based care for children and young people removed from their parents has better outcomes for children.
- 5.2 Norfolk has a strong in-house fostering offer to build on, and we need to make this known and promote our strengths to maximise reach and interest.
- 5.3 There is opportunity to work more strategically with the market looking at future trends, identifying any gaps and agreeing on the best way to approach and sufficiency challenge. Working with the market more collaboratively will help align our respective skills sets to specific placement types that will, between us, provide a comprehensive offer across Norfolk. Working with the market in this way will mitigate against wasted energies around competition and harness a more collegial force that will help drive best practise and value for money.
- 5.4 The increase in local fostering provision will help secure placements for children that are closer to their communities and networks of support, a significant factor in driving better outcomes.

- 5.5 A further consequence of increasing the overall fostering pool will be to reduce reliance on long-term residential care, which is both costly and does not always deliver the best outcomes for children.
- 5.6 Our position as the regional lead for the national fostering pathfinder will also enable us to bring in wider insight and learning to create a strong evidence base of what works.

6. Alternative Options

- 6.1 If the Norfolk County Council are not able to recruit more in-house carers, we become more susceptible to market influence and dependence. Whilst we want to work with the market collaboratively Norfolk needs to be in a strong position to maximise choice, flexibility and best VFM.
- 6.2 We will be more reliant on expensive residential care, and whilst for some young people this may be the most appropriate placement for them, this should be the exception where our ambition is to provide a family-based care wherever possible.

7. Financial Implications

- 7.1 The average cost for an in-house foster placement is c. £200 less per week than an IFA placement. The cost of a residential placement is, on average, over five times the cost of an average IFA placement.
- 7.2 Data shows that since the start of our fostering transformation programme, with the change to payments being linked to the needs of the child, we have seen an increase in the average needs of children in in-house foster placements, whilst there has been a reduction in the average needs of children in IFA placements.
- 7.3 The change in approach for in-house foster payments recognised and rewarded carers who support children and young people with the most challenging needs. The result will be that we have mitigated alternative, more costly, placements (such as residential care).

Continuing a focus on retaining foster carers, as well as on recruiting new carers, is critical to financial sustainability; ensuring fair and equitable payment that reflects the level of support required to meet children's needs is imperative to achieve this.

- 7.4 The fostering transformation to date has ensured that no foster carer has seen a reduction in the fees that they are receiving for a continuing

placement, and, in some cases, in-house carers have received an increase to reflect the move to payments recognising the complexity of care needs of the child. These additional costs will have been mitigated by the increased complexity of need supported, as per 7.2 above.

- 7.5 In addition, it is anticipated that increased recruitment and retention through the planned transformation will mitigate further spend on external residential care and so, as well as the improved outcomes for children and young people, NCC would also expect financial benefit in the region of £4 - £7.5m over the medium term. To achieve this, the trend of reducing foster carer numbers will need to be reversed initially, followed by increasing foster carer numbers by at least 30 per year.

8. Resource Implications

- 8.1 Staff:** Current work being undertaken around understanding if the service is resourced in all areas to remain responsive around recruitment and retention of foster carers.

- 8.2 Property:** N/A

- 8.3 IT:** Current work is being undertaken around understanding if further automation is required in monitoring the enquiries and journey to approval of foster carers.

There is a potential need for some form of CRM system to help manage long term enquiries and to keep them warm and engage with us so that when they are ready to apply, they choose us rather than an IFA. However, we also need to consider this in context of the work developing the regional recruitment hub.

9. Other Implications

- 9.1 Legal Implications:** N/A

- 9.2 Human Rights Implications:** N/A

- 9.3 Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) (this must be included):** N/A

- 9.4 Data Protection Impact Assessments (DPIA):** N/A

9.5 Health and Safety implications (where appropriate): N/A

9.6 Sustainability implications (where appropriate): N/A

9.7 Any Other Implications: N/A

10. Risk Implications / Assessment

10.1 N/A

11. Recommendations

The Select Committee is asked to:

1. Review and provide feedback on the fostering work outlined in this paper.
2. Provide any feedback on approach and how to make this everyone's business.

12. Background Papers

12.1 Norfolk Fostering Service Annual Report

Officer Contact

If you have any questions about matters contained within this paper, please get in touch with:

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If you need this report in large print, audio, braille, alternative format or in a different language please contact 0344 800 8020 or 0344 800 8011 (textphone) and we will do our best to help.

People and Communities Forward Work Programme, 2024-25

Item No. 9

Date	Report	Issues for consideration	Cabinet Member	Exec Director
17 May 2024				
19 July 2024	Sexual and Reproductive Health Services in Norfolk		Cllr Bill Borrett	Director of Public Health
	Carers strategy	including support for carers and Carers Matters Norfolk	Cllr Alison Thomas	Interim Executive Director of Adult Social Services
27 September 2024	Oral health across all age groups		Cllr Bill Borrett	Director of Public Health
	Winter Planning		Cllr Bill Borrett	Interim Executive Director of Adult Social Services
22 November 2024				
24 January 2025				
21 March 2025				

Reports to be scheduled:

Development of Norfolk County Council Health Strategy - Late 2024 / early 2025

Action required:

Select Committee to note the forward plan and suggest any reports for consideration for future meetings.