



**People and Communities Select Committee  
Minutes of the Meeting held on 17 November 2023 at 10am  
in the Council Chamber, County Hall**

**Present:**

Cllr Fran Whymark (Chair)  
Cllr Ed Connolly (Vice-Chair)  
Cllr John Crofts  
Cllr Claire Bowes  
Cllr Brenda Jones  
Cllr Brian Long  
Cllr Paul Neale

**Substitute Members Present**

Cllr Michael Chenery of Horsburgh for Cllr Michael Dalby  
Cllr Philip Duigan for Cllr Julian Kirk  
Cllr Maxine Webb for Cllr Mike Smith-Clare

**Other attendees:**

Titus Adam	Assistant Director of Finance
Debbie Bartlett	Interim Executive Director of Adult Social Services
Harvey Bullen	Director of Strategic Finance
Chris Butwright	Assistant Director Public Health Prevention & Policy
Sarah Cubitt	Commissioning and Service Development Manager, Children's Services
Cllr Margaret Dewsbury	Cabinet Member for Communities and Partnerships
Merry Halliday	Armed Forces Covenant Senior Officer
Paul Harker	Place Planning Manager, Children's Services
Isabel Horner	Sufficiency Delivery Manager, Children's Services
Cllr Kay Mason Billig	Leader and Cabinet Member for Strategy and Governance
Tom McCabe	Chief Executive Officer
Air Commodore Kevin Pellatt	Armed Forces Commissioner
Leon Ringer	Finance Business Partner (Adult Social Care)
Diane Steiner	Deputy Director of Public Health

**Attendees present via video link:**

Fiona Corless	Assistant Director Specialist and Complex Commissioning, Children's Services
James Wilson	Director for Sufficiency Planning and Education Strategy, Children's Services

**1. Apologies for Absence**

- 1.1 Apologies were received from Cllr Sharon Blundell, Cllr Julian Kirk (Cllr Phillip Duigan substituting), Cllr Michael Dalby (Cllr Michael Chenery of Horsburgh substituting) and from Cllr Mike Smith-Clare (Cllr Maxine Webb substituting). The Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care sent her apologies for the meeting; the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance was being substituted by the

Leader and Cabinet Member for Strategy and Governance to present item 11, “Financial and Strategic Planning”.

## **2. Minutes of last meeting**

- 2.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 29 September 2023 were agreed as an accurate record and signed by the Chairman.

## **3. Declarations of Interest**

- 3.1 The Vice-Chair declared a non-pecuniary interest related to item 7 as an armed forces veteran.
- 3.2 Cllr Maxine Webb declared a non-pecuniary interest related to item 9 as she received a package of short breaks for one of her children.

## **4. Items received as urgent business**

- 4.1 There were no items of urgent business.

## **5. Public Questions**

- 5.1 no public questions were received.

## **6. Member Questions and Issues**

- 6.1 No public questions were received.

## **7. Norfolk Armed Forces Covenant Annual Report**

- 7.1.1 The Select Committee received the report providing the year-end progress report on Norfolk’s independent Armed Forces Covenant Board’s Strategy and Action Plan 2022/24, the Board’s forward strategy, an update on national policy developments, and information about the recruitment of a new Armed Forces Commissioner for Norfolk.
- 7.1.2 The Cabinet Member for Communities and Partnerships introduced the report:
- This report signified the end-of-year annual report for the Armed Forces Covenant Board, the end of the two-year action plan and the end of the 5-year term of office of Air Commodore Kevin Pellatt as Armed Forces Commissioner for Norfolk and Chair of the Covenant Board.
  - The Cabinet Member for Communities and Partnerships thanked Air Commodore Pellatt for his service to the Armed Forces Covenant Board during which he had steered through the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic, the sad passing of Queen Elizabeth II, and the Coronation of King Charles III. He had championed projects such as the opening of the dental practice next to RAF Marham, publication of the first needs assessment for the armed forces community in Norfolk, encouraging doctors’ surgeries to

sign up to the veteran friendly GP scheme, and built strong links with the Integrated Care Board.

- A new and ambitious action plan would be handed over to the incoming commissioner and the Cabinet Member for Communities and Partnerships thanked Air Commodore Pellatt for his work, support, and leadership over the past 5 years. The Committee echoed these sentiments.

### 7.1.3

The Armed Forces Commissioner introduced the report:

- He started the role with a comprehensive plan of what to deliver, and during his time in the role the country had experienced a pandemic, two lockdowns, the sad death of Queen Elizabeth II, the Coronation of King Charles III, war in Europe and unrest in the Middle East, which had all affected the armed forces community.
- The four main objectives of the plan had been achieved:
  - Building communities: the Board has provided financial support to RAF Marham, 1<sup>st</sup> The Queen's Dragoon Guards at Robertson Barracks, and to Town and Parish Councils for commemorative activities. In 2019 the Covenant Board was awarded the Community Award by the Royal British Legion. Air Commodore Pellatt said there were 2500 service personnel in the community, mostly at RAF Marham and 40,000 veterans living in the County.
  - Health, Welfare and Housing: the Board awarded a £60K wellbeing grant, shared by five organisations, to improve mental health and reduce isolation in the armed forces community. Provision of the dental surgery at RAF Marham had been a great success; the Armed Forces Commissioner thanked Covenant Board officers for their work in achieving this. There had been progress in the number of GP surgeries registering as Veteran Friendly. Help had been given to many Service charities, including two small local charities, the Bridge for Heroes, based in King's Lynn, and Stand Easy in Norwich.
  - Education: the online service premium booklet second edition would be available soon.
  - Employment: this was the area that the Armed Forces Commissioner was least happy with as little progress had been made in identifying jobs for veterans in the renewable energy sector. He hoped that this could be taken forward in the future.
- The Armed Forces Commissioner thanked Norfolk County Council and Breckland District Council for their financial support, and the Covenant Officers for their work.

### 7.2

The following points were discussed and noted:

- A Committee Member felt more could be done to help veterans but noted that a lot had been achieved by the Armed Forces Covenant.
- A Committee Member raised concerns about the lack of progress discussed in the employment sector and asked what further could be done in this area. The Armed Forces Commissioner stated that most veterans found work within 6 months of leaving the armed forces, so this was not the biggest issue for veterans at that time. More work was needed with the offshore wind industry to identify what jobs were available and how they could be accessed; this would be taken forward.

- A Committee Member asked for information on the future of Robertson Barracks. The Armed Forces Commissioner had no information on the future of the barracks but did not think it was due for imminent closure.
- The Chair asked how much help had been given by the County Council to get veterans into work. The Armed Forces Commissioner replied that the Council had given lots of support to get veterans into work and there were veterans in many different roles across the council.
- The Vice-Chair thanked the Armed Forces Commissioner for his hard work.

7.3 The Select Committee **AGREED**:

1. To note the local and national developments set out in Section 1 of the report, particularly the Government's Armed Forces Act 2021 which brought in legislation for a new duty of due regard, requiring local authorities and other statutory bodies to consider the impact of their policies for health, housing, and education on the armed forces community.
2. To note the progress made in 2022/2023 to deliver the Norfolk Armed Forces Covenant Action Plan 2022/24, as summarised in Section 2 of the report.
3. To endorse the Armed Forces Covenant Board's forward strategy for 2024/2026, as set out in Section 3 of the report.
4. To note the recruitment of a new Armed Forces Commissioner will conclude by March 2024.

## 8. 2024 School Sufficiency Plan

8.1.1 The Select Committee received the draft report setting out the 2024 School sufficiency Plan which showed how Norfolk County Council will deliver its statutory duty to provide sufficient school places.

8.1.2 The Director for Sufficiency Planning and Education Strategy introduced the report to the Select Committee:

- There had been underlying demographic growth seen in some areas, but decline had been seen in others.
- There was a good track record of planning for school places in Norfolk as shown in the performance of school admissions over the past years.
- Demographics, growth and development as well as parental preference, Ofsted outcomes at schools and other factors were taken into account when planning for places required in each area across the County.
- Different types of schools now in place across the County meant that the council was no longer the admissions authority for all schools.

8.2 The following points were discussed and noted:

- A Committee Member discussed that the catchment areas used in modelling for sufficiency planning did not always match the natural direction of movement of families travelling to access schools when a housing development was built. The Sufficiency Delivery Manager replied that school catchment areas were often based on historic boundaries of wards, and often people expected to attend their catchment school. Sometimes, however, there was movement to locations which were easier to attend and when developments were built catchments may need to be reviewed. Officers took parental preference into account when planning although this could change through the year based on a number of factors.

- A Committee Member asked about Community Infrastructure Levy and its potential impact on funds for education. Officers had been given indication that the funding would be spread more thinly but had not been given full information at that time.
- A Committee member asked for more information on Special Educational Needs and Disabilities within the strategy, noting that Safety Valve and Local First Inclusion ran alongside the strategy. The Sufficiency Delivery Manager replied that officers aimed to understand the needs of children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities and forecast accordingly, including planning for Special Resource Bases.
- Cllr John Crofts asked whether there was enough short stay provision in Norfolk, quoting a particular case where an exclusion had been upheld. The Director for Sufficiency Planning and Education Strategy replied that short stay provision was not within the remit of this strategy. There was a plan to create school led provision co-run by schools for children who had been excluded or needing reintegration. There had been pressure on alternative provision in 2023-24 across the country due to an increased trend of children being excluded. The Chair encouraged Cllr Crofts to email The Director for Sufficiency Planning and Education Strategy and the Cabinet Member for Children's Services to discuss the case he raised in his question in more detail.
- A Committee Member asked whether planning was in place for mitigations which could be needed if Labour were elected to the next Government; they had said they were committed to bringing in 20% VAT on private school fees which the Member felt could result in pupils leaving the private school system. Officers clarified that changes in policy were one of the factors considered as part of this strategy. If this occurred, the model would be updated.
- Officers confirmed that it had not been necessary to use independent school places to make up a shortfall in mainstream school places so far in Norfolk. This was sometimes required in the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities sector, however.
- A Committee Member felt it was important that requirements for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities was included in the strategy.
- The Chair asked whether the department was working with academies on admission arrangements. Officers confirmed that work was taking place with all types of schools.
- It was clarified that nutrient neutrality impacted on the strategy via its impact on the speed of house building; nutrient neutrality only affected construction of places with overnight accommodation.

8.3 The Select Committee **AGREED** to recommend that the Cabinet adopt the School Sufficiency Plan 2024.

## 9. Short Breaks Strategy 2023-2026

9.1.1 The Select Committee received the report setting out details of the co-produced Short Breaks Strategy (2023-26) and the proposed change in approach from an existing financial-focused Resource Allocation System to a new, outcome-focused Circle of Support System.

9.1.2 The Director for Sufficiency Planning and Education Strategy introduced the report to the Select Committee:

- The strategy had been co-produced with families, with a move towards the Circle of Support system. Consultation had been carried out about this change.
- This would be a needs-led approach, focussing on community-led short breaks, a more inclusive model and more choices.
- Feedback from the consultation gave a range of opinions including positive feedback as well as concerns. Officers understood that some concerns had been raised due to people feeling that options would be compulsory and reassured the Committee that options would not be imposed on people. The changes would be put in place to provide more choices and be more needs led, while keeping the current options in place.
- Officers would work on communication about the changes to make sure people understood what they would be, and they would be put in place in a phased way.

## 9.2 The following points were discussed and noted:

- Officers were asked if the changes in the strategy also included an increase in respite for carers. The Assistant Director, Specialist and Complex Commissioning, hoped that by providing a wider geographical spread of activities would reduce the burden on parents and carers to take children to activities or allow them to go home while the activity took place. Respite was arranged on an individual case basis.
- More information was requested on objectives for children who were profoundly disabled. Officers wanted to allow opportunities for all children to be as independent as possible dependent on their own needs and abilities; they **agreed** to add more information into the strategy to make this clearer.
- Vacancies for Children with Disabilities Social Workers and the wait time for families to access support from this service was queried. Officers **agreed** to provide the Committee with a written response after the meeting.
- Officers were thanked for the consultation which included targeted communication for families.
- More detail on what co-production had taken place was requested. Officers confirmed that reference groups had worked on co-production; Family Voice had been involved in developing the 10 objectives set out in the report and been involved in discussions about the Circle of Support approach.
- The Director for Sufficiency Planning and Education Strategy confirmed that the new tool discussed in the report was focussed on co-designing the right package of support for children based on their needs. It would involve discussion with families, carers and children to develop the package through deciding on the outcomes they wanted. The service would provide information on how these outcomes could be met so families could choose activities and packages which were best for them. This was a move away from a funding focussed strategy and towards a needs-based strategy.
- The case studies discussed in the report were desktop studies to ensure that changes to the strategy would not disadvantage strategies, with no actual changes having been made to any family's packages.
- It was noted that work was needed on communicating services to families, changes to the services and how the new approach would work. The strategy would be put in place over a period of time allowing time for the new system to be explained to parents and carers.
- A Member of the Committee was unhappy with the amount of co-production in the report and raised concerns about how effective the new tool would be.

Officers highlighted the summary of feedback set out in the report which started on page 123 which indicated how respondents' feedback had been taken into account.

- Funding for this strategy was queried. Officers confirmed there was no investment or saving involved in the strategy and the budget was demanded.
- A Committee Member felt that the Committee should note the comments received in response to the consultation. The Chair noted these comments and suggested that more co-production could be carried out in future.

9.3 The Select Committee **AGREED** the proposals and attached reports relating to the implementation of the Circle of Support System as part of the Short Breaks Strategy (2023-26).

## 10. Drug and Alcohol Member Working Group: Alcohol health promotion campaign

10.1.1 The Select Committee received the report setting out the work of the Member Working Group set up by the People and Communities Committee which looked at ways to change social attitudes towards excessive alcohol consumption and recreational drug use, to review what is known to work and not work to effect behaviour change, and to develop a positive campaign and messaging around healthier drinking and preventing recreational drug use.

10.1.2 The Deputy Director of Public Health introduced the report to the Select Committee

- The Chair of the Select Committee had chaired the Member Working Group with Cllr Brenda Jones, Cllr Maxine Webb and Cllr Paul Neale.
- The Group had found that there had been a decrease in overall drinking with 186,000 people drinking over the recommended number of units per week. The highest amount of drinking was seen in the middle age group, with more drinking seen in men than women, and a higher amount of drinking seen in people of lower socio-economic groups.
- The evidence base for recreational drug use was weak, so the focus of the group's work was on alcohol use.
- The focus of the work was on people who were unaware of their drinking in relation to recommended guidelines, looking at what would be effective to bring behaviour change, and reviewing previous campaigns to learn from others and how to target the audience.
- The focus of the campaign would be men aged 40-74 from lower socio-economic groups in Norfolk. There had been work with the communications department looking at ways to help people think about units of alcohol and signposting to ready to change.
- The campaign was due to be launched in February to follow on from "dry January" and Ready to Change.
- The Deputy Director of Public Health thanked the Members who took part in the working group and supported the campaign.

10.2 The following points were discussed and noted:

- It was **suggested** that the poster could include a visual reference of how many drinks 14 units was.
- It was **suggested** that links to Norfolk County Council help resources were included in the campaign materials as well as a QR code for instant access.

- A Committee Member was surprised that the data did not show young people as the target of the campaign, citing their presence drinking in towns at the weekend. The Member queried how young people could be discouraged from binge drinking. The Chair replied that the Working Group found young people as a group drank less than the older age group did at their age. There was a group of young people who drank a lot but there was a growing proportion of young people who didn't drink.
- It was pointed out that the advertising shown in the report did not target those drinking at home and it was **suggested** this was an important demographic.
- The Chair had enjoyed taking part in the working group and considered that they might look at the impact of drugs in the future. Cllr Neale hoped that there would be a working group looking at vapes in the future; the Chair reminded the Committee that a report on vapes was being brought to the Committee in January 2024.
- The Norfolk tobacco control and vaping alliance had recently added vaping to their name and remit due to issues being seen, particularly in young people.
- A **request** was made for trading standards to be invited to the January 2024 meeting for the report on vaping due to their involvement in illegal vapes.

10.3 The Select Committee **AGREED** to endorse the recommendation of the working group for a targeted campaign aimed at educating the audience on what 14 units equates to, increase awareness of the benefits of drinking less and signpost users to trusted sources of information.

## 11. Financial and Strategic Planning

11.1.1 The Select Committee received the report setting out the latest Cabinet report in order to provide details of the saving proposals identified to date for 2024-25 budget setting to support the Select Committee's discussion of the specific proposals and enable the Committee to provide its feedback and input to a future meeting of Cabinet and thereby to inform budget decisions.

11.1.3 The Leader and Cabinet Member for Strategy and Governance introduced the report to the Cabinet Member:

- Cabinet was keen to engage with Select Committees so they could advise and comment on budget strategy and services in their remit.
- This report represented the second opportunity for the Select Committee to advise their view to Cabinet on the budget.
- The report had been presented to Cabinet in October 2023, setting out savings proposals to date, subject to the consultation ending in December 2023. The proposed savings totalled £26.5m and would make an important contribution to the Council dealing with its budget gap. More work was needed to set a balanced budget for the year.
- Significant challenges were seen in developing the budget for 2024-25 in the wider economy and finances. Many if not all upper tier authorities faced challenges, and there were no long-term solutions to funding being proposed.
- The autumn statement from Government was due in November, but there was no date for the local government provisional statement which would provide detailed information on the funding allocation for Norfolk County Council. This was expected by Mid-December at the earliest.
- In summer 2023, proposals for the budget were developed. These were shown in table 5 of the report and totalled £26.5m savings.



- The Committee's views on the savings within their remit were welcomed, along with proposals for areas for further exploration which may provide further savings and inform Cabinet's recommendations to Council and budget proposals.
- The Council continued to face uncertainty with finances and service delivery pressures. Most risks were seen in social care, demand, demography and complex care. It would be important to monitor and ensure delivery of budgets, with more difficult decisions ahead in the setting of the budget.
- It would be critical to work with partners across sectors to lobby for sustainable and adequate funding for local government and adult social care, and ensuring Norfolk received its share of funding.

The following points were discussed and noted:

- A Committee Member queried why no consultation was held on the changes to respite for adults with learning disabilities. The Interim Executive Director of Adult Social Services replied that the savings around respite in this service related to the department reviewing how they could get the most out of the contracts in place and would not change the service for users.
- A Committee Member asked if the settlement grant was estimated, based on the amount received in 2023-24 when calculating the budget for 2024-25. The Director of Strategic Finance replied that policy guidance had been given for 2024-25 which was used when putting together the budget. This assumption would change when the actual settlement amount was known.
- The impact of budget cuts on demand led services in adult social care and children's services was queried. The Leader and Cabinet Member for Strategy and Governance replied that the Council's budget was increasing each year by £70m. Demand was, however also increasing, so smarter ways of working were needed. Smarter ways of working could be used to provide the same services for less; cuts to essential services were not proposed.
- More detail was requested on Adult Social Care budget proposals shown on page 181-182 of the report. The Interim Executive Director of Adult Social Services gave more information about some of the queried proposals:
  - S2425ASS007, "Supporting more people through an enhanced reablement service that prevents, reduces and delays the need for ongoing care": Work had been done on the Norfolk First Support service who had been able to reach more people. They had recruited more staff, although still needed to do more recruitment. This team had improved their skills to help people be more independent and need less support moving forward.
  - S2425ASS008, "Reduce purchasing of short-term residential care, by focusing on more independent outcomes following hospital discharge": there had been challenges around discharge meaning people had needed to go into short term care. The Council was now in a stronger position to reduce the number of people needing short term beds, or needing them for a shorter period of time. This would allow people to have better independence when leaving hospital and needing less formal support when returning home.
  - S2425ASS009, "A programme of work based on data designed to support people earlier and connect them to services and support in their communities. The saving would be from prevention and early intervention (Connecting Communities additionality)": The

department had looked at how they supported people through Connecting Communities and there were indications that stretch savings could be delivered.

- Budget proposal S2425ASS016, “Delivering improved choice and independent outcomes for those with Mental Health needs”: this proposal related to residential choices and how people would be supported to remain independent. the Chair asked for information on this to be included in the promoting independence report on the January 2024 agenda.
- More detail was requested on Children’s Services budget proposals CS005, CS006, CS007, CS008, related to the home to school transport budget and how children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities travelling independently would look in practice, and CS011 shown on page 183-184 of the report, particularly how Local First Inclusion would impact on the savings shown. It was noted that many families were not able to choose Special Educational Needs and Disabilities education facilities and Special Resource Base’s near to their home at that time so it was queried how the savings set out would be arrived at.
- Cllr Webb **suggested** that work should be done to identify how the cost of carrying out Special Educational Needs and Disabilities tribunals could be reduced. She felt there were other ways to deal with related issues other than via solicitors. The Chief Executive Officer replied that officers were looking at how tribunals were dealt with, and he would pass these comments on to the Executive Director of Children's Services.
- The Chief Executive Officer gave information on S2425CS005, “Inclusion: More primary aged children with SEND can travel independently by adapting the Travel Independence Travel Across Nation (TITAN) programme”: This work was intended to encourage independence in this cohort of children. The department would look at the capacity of Special Resource Base’s around the county to reduce the miles travelled for children to access education.
- S2425CS011, “Reshaping our system support for learning and education aligned to the evolving role of the local authority and creation of a self-improving education system”: it was **agreed** that a written response would be provided after the meeting. The Assistant Director of Finance clarified that this was related to staffing requirements to support a change in responsibility for the County Council in this area.
- The Leader and Cabinet Member for Strategy and Governance discussed that departments had been asked to come up with realistic savings options. There was a programme to build new schools and the Council was asking as many academies as possible to have a Specialist Resource Base on site so children could go to school locally where possible and felt that the tribunal issue may require lobbying Government to ensure that the assessment process was better. The Council would defend cases where this was felt to be the best option.
- A Committee Member discussed budget proposal S2425CS005 and S2425CS006 which related to extra care housing for adults and young adults. This would need a lot of capital investment but provide people an alternative to a care home. They noted that this would provide an efficiency saving compared to carers travelling around the county to peoples’ homes. The Finance Business Partner (Adult Social Care) added that savings were already in the pipeline for this and had been brought into this budget; nutrient

neutrality had delayed delivery of this. Swallowtail and Meadow Walk in Fakenham were examples of this of care which were already open.

- The Chair had attended a conference where he learned about work which Adult Social Care could do which could help take pressure off the NHS.

The Select Committee:

1. Considered the latest Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy position as reported to Cabinet in October 2023 (Appendix 1), noting in particular the emerging risks and uncertainties within the Council's planning position.
2. Considered and commented on the savings proposals for 2024-25 as set out in Appendix 1, which fall within the Committee's remit.
3. Noted the budget gap which remains to be closed for 2024-25 and in this context to comment on any areas the Select Committee would recommend exploring for savings development in relation to the services within the Select Committee's remit, in order to provide further input to the 2024-25 budget process and inform the final package of saving proposals put forward to Cabinet later in the year.
4. Considered savings opportunities under the following headings:
  - a. New initiatives which would deliver savings:
    - The committee **suggested** that work be carried out to reduce the amount of money spent on Special Educational Needs and Disabilities tribunals.
  - b. Activities which could be ceased in order to deliver a saving;
  - c. Activities which the Council should seek to maintain at the current level as far as possible (i.e. areas where the Committee considers there is limited scope for savings).

## **12. Forward Work Programme**

- 12.1 The Chair noted that promoting independence would also be added to the January meeting.
- 12.2 It was requested that the report on vaping in January 2024 include information on prevention and from trading standards. The work being done by trading standards on vaping discussed at a recent Infrastructure and Development Select Committee meeting was noted.
- 12.3 The Select Committee agreed the forward plan

The Meeting Closed at 12:31

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