



## Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the Meeting Held on 19 July 2023  
at 10 am at County Hall Norwich

### Present:

Cllr Daniel Elmer (Vice Chair)

Cllr Carl Annison

Cllr Lesly Bambridge

Cllr Phillip Duigan

Cllr Tom FitzPatrick

Cllr John Fisher

Cllr Mark Kiddle-Morris

Cllr Keith Kiddie

Cllr Brian Long

Cllr Ed Maxfield

Cllr Jamie Osborn

Cllr Watkins

### Substitute Members Present:

Cllr Emma Corlett for Cllr Steve Morpew

### Also, present (who took a part in the meeting):

Grahame Bygrave

Interim Executive Director of Community and Environmental Services

Al Collier

Director of Procurement

Cllr Margaret Dewsbury

Cabinet Member of Communities and Partnerships

Jonathan Franklin

Strategy Manager (Procurement & Net Zero)

Simon Hughes

Director of Property

Kat Hulatt

Assistant Director Governance (Legal Services) & Monitoring Officer

Cllr Jane James

Cabinet Member of Corporate Services and Innovation

Cllr Graham Plant

Cabinet Member of Highways, Infrastructure and Transport

Peter Randall

Democratic Support and Scrutiny Manager

Sarah Rhoden

Director of Community, Information and Learning

Jeremy Wiggin

Head of Sustainable Transport

### 1A Apologies for Absence

- 1A.1 Apologies were received from Cllr Steve Morpew (Cllr Emma Corlett substituting), and from Cabinet Members Cllr Eric Vardy and Cllr Andrew Jamieson.

### 1B Election of Vice-Chair for the meeting

- 1B.1 Cllr Jamie Osborn nominated himself seconded by Cllr Daniel Elmer. Cllr Jamie Osborn was duly elected to sit as Vice-Chair for the meeting.

## **2 Minutes**

- 2.1 The minutes of the previous meeting held on 16 June 2023 were confirmed as an accurate record and signed by the Chair.

## **3. Declarations of Interest**

- 3.1 There were no declarations of interest.

## **4. Public Question Time**

- 4.1 There were no public questions.

## **5. Local Member Issues/Questions**

- 5.1 There were no local Member issues/questions.

## **6 Call In**

- 6.1 The Committee noted that the call-ins received would be discussed at items 8, 9, 10 and 11.

## **7 Implementation of the Climate Strategy**

- 7.1.1 The annexed report (7) was received.

- 7.1.2 The Strategy Manager (Procurement & Net Zero) introduced the report to Scrutiny Committee:
- The strategy published in June 2023 set out a vision for the Council's move towards a low carbon future. The next steps were translating this into practical delivery and that the right governance and monitoring was in place.
  - This was forward looking and set out the approach to engagement and action planning, delivery of the estate's emission target, development of the funding blueprint, amending the policy framework and monitoring and reporting.

- 7.2 The following points were discussed and noted.
- The Vice-Chair asked what the timescales were for developing the funding blueprint. The Strategy Manager (Procurement & Net Zero) confirmed this was due by Winter 2023 or early 2024 and would look at mechanisms of funding.
  - The Vice-Chair asked if the scale of funding required to achieve 14% reduction in emissions year on year had been looked at. The Director of Procurement replied that scope 3 was being broken down into procurement categories, with action plans being developed. This would be carried out alongside the procurement pipeline. The council produced around 1.4% of the county wide emissions
  - It was noted that the largest procurement area was passenger transport with construction being the third largest area.
  - With recognition that Norfolk County Council was the transport authority for Norfolk, officers were asked what funding there was to back up ambitions in the Local Transport Plan to reduce emissions. Officers replied that funding had been levered from the Department for Transport to fund schemes implementing

electric buses, active travel, cycle paths and walking and £50m had been achieved through the Bus Service Improvement Plan. The private sector was supporting the ambitions, for example First Bus had invested in the implementation of electric buses in Norwich. The Cabinet Member of Highways, Infrastructure and Transport added that around £180m Government funding had been received to use in Transport for Norwich and other projects to improve the carbon footprint of Norwich and Norfolk.

- Officers confirmed there had been engagement with supply chains, district councils, the NHS and transport operators among others before the climate strategy was published. Since publication there had been discussion with the Integrated Care System board, and a business conference held. Engagement would be ongoing. Upon a query about alternative methods of engagement and consultation, the Cabinet Member of Highways, Infrastructure and Transport confirmed that the legal framework for consultation with the public and stakeholders had been followed.
- The Interim Executive Director of Community and Environmental Services confirmed that the last upgrade phase of street lighting to LED would be due to start in the next 6 months.
- A Committee Member asked about progress towards reducing the use of gas and oil boilers. The Cabinet Member of Corporate Services and Innovation replied that the large gas boilers at County Hall had been removed, with the remaining gas energy sources planned for removal as part of the decarbonisation programme. Changing heating over from fossil fuel based to electric in other.
- The Cabinet Member of Highways, Infrastructure and Transport did not think there would be any immediate changes to this policy if the Governance of the Council changed to a directly elected leader. The Assistant Director of Governance (Legal Services) & Monitoring Officer added that if the Council moved to having a directly elected leader, Full Council would agree the policy framework.
- A Committee Member noted that not all bus, taxi and travel operators had the capital to invest in electric or low carbon vehicles and queried whether the Council should stop investing in such providers. Officers responded that, as the Council had plans to shift its own vehicles to electric, they were confident in the Council's progress in direct emissions. The Cabinet Member of Highways, Infrastructure and Transport noted that buses were required to have two MOTs a year and undergo emissions tests to remain legal.
- The Vice-Chair noted that a further 14% reduction in emissions in the County was required per year, and Norfolk was not on target to achieve this. He felt this new target should be reflected in the strategy.
- The Vice-Chair felt the scheme did not show how quantifiable carbon reduction would be achieved. The Interim Executive Director of Community and Environmental Services replied that guidance was expected from Government on Local Transport Plans which would set out the aims and ambitions for local transport and national carbon requirements moving forward to inform funding opportunities.
- Cllr Ed Maxfield arrived at 10:47.
- Indirect emissions and the lack of investment in support for businesses and social care providers to invest in transport was raised.
- The skill issue in Norfolk to retrofitting was raised as a concern and discussed. Officers responded that work was being carried out encouraging colleges to put

on training in these areas, and indicating to colleges and universities where the skills gaps were. The Chair was happy to note that the supply issue in these skill areas was being addressed.

- The Cabinet Member of Highways, Infrastructure and Transport confirmed that Cabinet Members had a good relationship with Norfolk's MPs who lobbied on the Council's behalf on improvements needed in the Norfolk education system.
- The Director of Procurement confirmed that action plans would be brought forward in autumn 2023.
- Use of renewable liquid gases and microgeneration was raised. Officers had looked at a range of renewable approaches for its buildings including microgeneration.

7.3 The Committee **considered** the plans for taking the climate strategy forward and for monitoring and reporting

## **8 Point of order**

8.1 The committee agreed to take discussion of item 8, "Call-In: Norwich Airport Industrial Estate Link, and item 9, "Call-In: Norwich Heartsease Fiveways Junction", together, with a separate vote to be taken on each item.

## **9. Call-In: Norwich Airport Industrial Estate Link, and Call-In: Norwich Heartsease Fiveways Junction**

9.1.1 The annexed reports, (8) and (9) were received.

9.1.2 The Chair explained the way in which he would handle this item to best ensure a fair and balanced scrutiny process and to decide what (if any) issues the Committee would refer to the Cabinet. The options that were available to the Committee were set out in the report.

9.1.3 The Chair welcomed Cllr Emma Corlett, Cllr Alison Birmingham, Cllr Maxine Webb and Cllr Julie Brociek-Coulton as the Councillors who had called in the two decisions. They outlined their reasons for having done so and asked questions of Cllr Graham Plant, the Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport and of the officers that were present for the consideration of these two items.

9.2.1 The Councillors who had called in the two items asked the Committee to consider their concerns which centred around governance of Transport for Norwich Advisory Committee:

- Governance issues had been raised about the Transport for Norwich Advisory Committee, which identified that members of the Advisory Committee were not able to make decisions. Decisions of the Advisory Committee were reserved to the Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport.
- Work had been carried out to ensure Committee members understood and were operating within the Terms of Reference, which stated that the Advisory Committee would have 4 members from the Council, of whom one would be the Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport, who would also be the Chair.
- Ahead of the meeting of the 31 May 2023, the agenda circulated indicated the Chair was not the Cabinet Member and there was no indication on this agenda

that the stated Chair was substituting for the Cabinet Member. Advisory Committee Members therefore chose to withdraw from the meeting and the meeting could not go ahead. The items due for consideration at the meeting were taken as a delegated Cabinet Member decision.

- Equality Impact Assessments were not circulated with the agenda reports; they were circulated at a later date, but Councillors felt this was not enough notice.

9.2.2 Cllr Birmingham discussed her concerns specifically related to the Norwich Heartsease Fiveways Junction call-in

- As local Member for Heartsease, Cllr Birmingham was disappointed that this scheme had not been discussed with her and the voice of residents had not been taken into consideration. She noted that 47% of respondents to the consultation on the proposal disagree with the aims and 49% disliked the shared use path.
- The scheme was not supported by the Norwich Cycling Campaign or the Norwich Society. There was no discussion with her as local member or consideration of the voice of local residents.
- Cllr Birmingham would have liked to see raised tables as a visual prompt to slow vehicles at the crossing and a raised area between the cycling and walking area. She was happy that her suggestion of a 20mph speed limit had been taken on board.
- Cllr Birmingham queried the proposal to buy land from the doctors' surgery between St Williams Way and Plumstead Road East.

9.3.1 The Cabinet Member of Highways, Infrastructure and Transport responded to the Councillors' comments:

- The Cabinet Member of Highways, Infrastructure and Transport believed that Cllr Birmingham had been involved in discussions related to the Heartsease development and site visits, and her points had been taken into account. Cllr Birmingham clarified that she had not attended a site visit.
- The Committee meeting arranged for the 31 May 2023 had been to discuss the two schemes which had been called in, but it had not been possible to proceed due to a Councillor leaving the meeting which made the meeting inquorate.
- Due to the tight timescale involved with these two schemes, it was not deemed possible to bring them to a later meeting as doing so would have risked non-delivery and loss of funding. Because of this the Cabinet Member of Highways, Infrastructure and Transport took the decisions under delegation.
- Through the shaping of each scheme, the public and stakeholders had been engaged with.
- As the Heartsease scheme had been planned alongside other works in the area, delay in delivery of this scheme would have risked funding for the delivery of this and other schemes in the area (due to Department for Transport requirements that the funding needed to be spent by the end of the financial year)..
- The comments from Norwich Cycling Group were considered. It had not been possible to take all of their requests into account, but the best had been done in the constraints of the locations.

9.3.2

The Head of Sustainable Transport responded to the Councillors' comments:

- The Heartsease junction had a high accident rate particularly for pedestrians and cyclists due to the alignment of the junction. Other options for the junction had been looked at including a Dutch style roundabout, which were not possible due to the space.
- Land discussions were being progressed about gaining access to land around the junction to create segregated space for pedestrians and cyclists.
- Concerns raised in the public consultation had been addressed in the report. Active Travel England were involved in the design of the scheme and felt this was the best design within the constraints.
- Delivery of the schemes needed to be carried out within a set window or funding would be removed.
- The Head of Sustainable Transport had understood that Cllr Birmingham was involved in discussions and apologised if this was not the case.
- The Head of Sustainable Transport clarified that if the Transport for Norwich Advisory Committee had met to discuss these schemes on 20 July 2023 then delivery of these would have been at risk.

9.4

Councillors calling-in the decision questioned the Cabinet Member and officers:

- The inaccurate Chair listed on the agenda was queried. The Cabinet Member of Highways, Infrastructure and Transport clarified that he was not present at the meeting due to being at a funeral. The Assistant Director of Governance (Legal Services) & Monitoring Officer confirmed That Deputy Cabinet Members could attend meetings and support the Cabinet Member in decision making but could not make decisions. The terms of reference of the committee stated that the Cabinet Member would be Chair and allowed for substitution. The Cabinet Member of Highways, Infrastructure and Transport **agreed** to discuss with the Assistant Director of Governance (Legal Services) & Monitoring Officer to get clarity on the status around whether his Deputy Cabinet Member could substitute for him at Advisory Committee meetings.
- It was confirmed that in all cases, local member protocol should be followed, to inform members of changes to schemes in their area. The fact that Cllr Birmingham felt that she had not been engaged with adequately and Cllr Webb had not been engaged with about changes to a different scheme in her area meant that the protocol had not been followed.
- Cllr Emma Corlett summed up:
  - the Chair named on the agenda fell outside of the Terms of Reference of the Transport for Norwich Advisory Committee.
  - The Local Member Protocol had not been followed since Cllr Birmingham had not received proper engagement.
  - There had not been proper information circulated on why the meeting of the 20 July 2023 had been cancelled.

9.5 Members and substitute Members of the Committee questioned the Cabinet Member and officers:

- Points raised by Committee Members were that the Terms of Reference did not require named substitutes, that the constitution stated Cabinet Members could made decisions on an urgent basis without referring to anyone, and that there were no technical issues with the schemes. It was also pointed out that this was a non-decision making body.
- A Committee Member asked the Cabinet Member of Highways, Infrastructure

and Transport if he believed that the meeting was fully constituted with Cllr Hemsall, Deputy Cabinet Member of Highways, Infrastructure and Transport, attending in his absence. The Cabinet Member of Highways, Infrastructure and Transport replied that he believed that Cllr Hemsall had attended as his substitute. As this was an Advisory Committee, anything discussed at that meeting would have to be passed to him to inform his decision; his Deputy would not have the power to take the decision and so she would have passed the information discussed at the meeting to him. It was pointed out that since the agenda named Cllr Hemsall as the Chair, technically The Cabinet Member of Highways, Infrastructure and Transport did not give his apologies.

- The Cabinet Member of Highways, Infrastructure and Transport was asked what value he gave to the Advisory Committee. The Cabinet Member of Highways, Infrastructure and Transport replied that the Advisory Committee gave him advice on taking decisions, similar to the steering groups in Great Yarmouth and King's Lynn. It was important for Members to engage in discussions about schemes to provide him with advice which would help inform his decisions.
- The Cabinet Member of Highways, Infrastructure and Transport confirmed that he felt he had made the right decision based on the evidence. The department worked collaboratively with all District Councils on road and transport schemes and consulted with partners. The meeting to discuss the two schemes was convened to gain input from Councillors into his decisions however was inquorate. Since there was a timescale in place round the two schemes in question, He had made them under delegation without reconvening a meeting.
- Both of the schemes in question had urgent statutory requirements including Traffic Regulation Orders and planning; once the meeting did not go ahead, the timescale for progression of the two schemes became critical. This meant that The Cabinet Member of Highways, Infrastructure and Transport took them both as delegated decisions.
- The Chair noted that 7.1c of the constitution set out the roles and responsibilities of Deputy Cabinet Members. This stated that they could deputise at meetings and speak on behalf of the Cabinet Member but did not have decision making power. Since the Transport for Norwich Advisory Committee was not a decision making body, the Chair felt that the Deputy Cabinet Member could have deputised, and the meeting could have gone ahead.

## 9.6 **Resolution of Call-In: Norwich Airport Industrial Estate Link**

- 9.6.1 To clarify the position around whether the Deputy Cabinet Member can substitute for the Cabinet Member at meetings, Cllr Brian Long proposed that the Scrutiny Committee should "note the call in and take no further action and suggest that the Cabinet Member review the terms of the reference of the Transport for Norwich Advisory Committee". Cllr Carl Annison seconded this proposal.

- 9.6.2 With 9 votes for, 3 against and 1 abstention, Scrutiny Committee **RESOLVED** to note the call-in but take no further action, and suggest that the Cabinet Member reviews the Terms of Reference of Transport for Norwich Advisory Committee

## 9.7 **Resolution of Call-In: Norwich Heartsease Fiveways Junction**

- 9.7.1 The Vice Chair proposed that "Scrutiny Committee refer the matter back to the Cabinet Member in consultation with the Local Member". Cllr Emma Corlett seconded

this proposal. With 3 votes for, 9 against and 1 abstention, this proposal was lost.

9.7.2 Cllr Long proposed that “Scrutiny Committee should note the call in and take no further action and suggest that the Cabinet Member review the terms of the reference of the Transport for Norwich Advisory Committee”. Cllr Carl Annison seconded this proposal.

9.7.3 With 10 votes for and 3 against, Scrutiny Committee **RESOLVED** to note the call-in but take no further action, and suggest that the Cabinet Member reviews the Terms of Reference of Transport for Norwich Advisory Committee

9.8 The committee took a break from 12:13 until 12:25

## **10 Call In: Adult Learning –Community Delivery**

10.1.1 The annexed report, (10) was received.

10.1.2 The Chair explained the way in which he would handle this item to best ensure a fair and balanced scrutiny process and to decide what (if any) issues the Committee would refer to the Cabinet. The options that were available to the Committee were set out in the report.

10.1.3 The Chair welcomed Cllr Emma Corlett, Cllr Alison Birmingham, Cllr Maxine Webb and Cllr Julie Brociek-Coulton as the Councillors who had called in the decision. They outlined their reasons for having done so and asked questions of Cllr Margaret Dewsbury, the Cabinet Member of Communities and Partnership, and of the officers that were present for the consideration of this item.

10.2.1 The Councillors who had called in the item asked the Committee to consider their concerns which centred around lack of engagement with the Adult Learning Steering Group and potential loss of service:

- The decision to remove adult learning from Wensum Lodge was made without consultation with the Adult Learning Steering Group
- The Steering Group was set up to discuss adult learning issues by People and Communities Select Committee.

10.3 The Cabinet Member of Communities and Partnerships and The Director of Community, Information and Learning responded to the Councillors’ concerns and those set out in the call-in documents:

- The steering group was consulted about issues such as content of courses and safeguarding but not about where courses were held as this was a business decision, noting that the service delivered from 137 locations. The location of courses was decided on statistics and demand.
- Communities committee in 2019 received a report on the future vision for Wensum lodge, which noted under-use of the site and a need for remedial repair putting a financial burden on the service. Following suggestion for use of the site as a creative hub, surveys were planned on this basis. However, the Covid-19 pandemic shortly after this meant that most courses moved online. Since the pandemic, courses had been moved back into various venues, including Wensum lodge and the option for learners to attend courses digitally had remained which meant the site continued to be under-used.



- There was an aim to deliver as many courses as possible in the 30% most deprived areas of the county, as set out in the Adult Learning Plan which was taken to the Adult Learning Steering Group, Infrastructure and Development select Committee for consideration prior to Cabinet approval.

Councillors calling-in the decision questioned the Cabinet Member and officers:

- The Terms of Reference of the steering group included being consulted on strategy, and ensuring that resources were managed well, therefore Cllr Webb suggested that the steering group should have been involved in the decisions discussed above. The Cabinet Member of Communities and Partnerships clarified that the feasibility study for a creative hub was not for an adult learning service.
- Consultation on the closure of Wensum Lodge was queried; the Director of Community, Information and Learning confirmed that staff forums and learner forums had been held. New locations for courses could not be confirmed at that time but would be discussed with learners and staff when known. Further forums would be held with staff and learners.
- The Director of Community, Information and Learning clarified that while some issues were discussed with the steering group, some issues were operational decisions which were tasked to the Director and Head of Service to implement, as part of implementation of the Adult Learning Plan agreed by Members. One such decision was the use of venues for courses. It was noted that course delivery locations changed often to meet needs of learners and there were 137 venues being used. Due to this frequent change, it was not possible to consult with the steering group each time.
- Cllr Emma Corlett felt that removing adult learning from Wensum Lodge was a strategic decision since 35% of classroom-based learning took place there which equated to 371 courses, of which 158 were self-financed and 213 were Government financed.
- Officers were asked if there were any calculations on risk of loss of income if courses were not able to be moved from Wensum Lodge to another location. The Cabinet Member for Communities and Partnerships replied that adult learning was self-sufficient; funding was received from Government funding, self-funded income and draw down of grants based on attainment of learners, and none from the Council budget. Therefore, the main risk highlighted was to self-funded learning, as Wensum Lodge was expensive to run. Therefore, the cost passed on to self-funded courses would increase as the cost to run the building increased.
- Councillors asked whether tutors had been asked how far they would be willing to travel. The Director of Community, Information and Learning confirmed that this discussion had not been held yet, but there would be focus on delivering courses where there was need in alternative venues in Norwich. Tutors were discussing their views with managers so that this could be considered.
- Cllr Emma Corlett expressed concern that there were not enough spaces in Norwich to move the courses held at Wensum Lodge into;
- Cllr Webb summed up:
  - the evidence for moving the service in the way described was not sufficient to show that the level of service currently provided could continue.
  - There had been no consultation with the Steering Group or Infrastructure and Development Committee on the changes.

- Wensum Lodge had always been seen as a jewel in the crown of adult education.

10.5 Members and substitute Members of the Committee questioned the Cabinet Member and officers:

- The Director of Community, Information and Learning confirmed that staff were told about the closure a couple of days before the cabinet report was published. The Vice-Chair felt there should have been a longer period of consultation on this with staff.
- The Director of Community, Information and Learning recognised that some courses were more challenging to move to another location. However, some tutors were excited to move to another location with better facilities and there was a mixed set of views on the change.
- A Committee Member queried how much Council funding was being used to upkeep the building, noting that many people in Norfolk did not access Wensum Lodge.
- Following a query, the Cabinet Member of Communities and Partnerships replied that other venues to hold adult learning were being reviewed to make them more accessible. Wensum Lodge had limited parking and no buses stopped there, so to access it by public transport relied on people being able bodied.
- A Committee Member asked whether, when seeking alternative venues, all types of provision would be sought - to assist those with lack of transport, for example. The Director of Community, Information and Learning confirmed that there was no intention for courses to stop being delivered and the service would seek to put on courses where possible in communities such as using libraries and other local venues. The Cabinet Member of Communities and Partnerships added that moving courses to community venues helped people to make friends local to them and supported the green agenda by reducing travel time.
- A Committee Member asked for more information on the long-term ambitions of Wensum Lodge raised in 2019, where there was consensus that the cost issues could be overcome. The Director of Property replied that, after the report in 2019, an architect reviewed the cost of improvements to the site and national professionals looked at heritage, access, utilities and drainage. From this, a cost plan was returned in February 2020, with a cost of £23m. Work on this project was halted during the pandemic when staff were redeployed to other areas of work. Inflation was now higher than February 2020, meaning the work to repair the building would be much higher than £23m. The funding environment was also different, and a change had been seen in the office market meaning less lets were taken up. Officers reviewed whether part of the vision could be delivered but it was not possible to split the project with cost pressures.
- A Committee Member asked if consideration had been given to public consultation over closure of Wensum Lodge. The Cabinet Member of Communities and Partnerships replied that this was a building in the oldest part of the city and had not always been used for Adult Education. She felt that continuing to adapt the building for the service's needs was taking away from the heritage of the site.
- The Chair noted that the argument was around whether the decision taken to remove adult education from Wensum Lodge was operational or not. He felt

that the courses which would be affected were limited to those with specialist equipment such as silversmithing and pottery. He therefore believed that this was an operational decision.

- Cllr Corlett did not agree with the Chair's summary; she noted that it was not the intention for classes to stop however it was a risk due to the unknown location of venues and tutor availability. She asked for more meaningful engagement with officers and learners and for information to be brought back to Cabinet and Scrutiny with public consultation.

10.6

The Vice-Chair proposed that "Scrutiny Committee refer the decision back to the Cabinet Member with a recommendation that public consultation be carried out", seconded by Cllr Brian Watkins. With 3 votes for and 9 against, the proposal was lost.

10.7.1

Cllr Brian Long proposed that Scrutiny Committee note the call-in but take no further action, seconded by Cllr Mark Kiddle-Morris.

10.7.2

With 9 votes for and 3 against, Scrutiny Committee **RESOLVED** to note the call-in but take no further action

## **11 Call In: Disposal, Acquisition and Exploitation of Property**

11.1.1 The annexed report, (11) was received.

11.1.2 The Chair explained the way in which he would handle this item to best ensure a fair and balanced scrutiny process and to decide what (if any) issues the Committee would refer to the Cabinet. The options that were available to the Committee were set out in the report.

11.1.3 The Chair welcomed Cllr Emma Corlett, Cllr Alison Birmingham, Cllr Maxine Webb and Cllr Julie Brociek-Coulton as the Councillors who had called in the decision. They outlined their reasons for having done so and asked questions of Cllr Jane James, the Cabinet Member of Corporate Services and Innovation, and of the officers that were present for the consideration of this item.

11.2 The Councillors who had called in the item asked the Committee to consider their concerns:

- In 2019 the Communities Committee agreed a vision for redevelopment of Wensum Lodge so that it could be a community asset to benefit local residents. £5.71m was set aside in the capital programme agreed by Council in February 2023 for redevelopment of the site.
- In 2019 the Executive Director of Community and Environmental Services assured the Committee in 2019 that the project would be carried out and if it was not cost effective that other options would be explored.
- Councillors therefore felt they should have been made aware how much work had been carried out to pursue this vision and why instead it had been agreed to sell the site. It was noted that this point was answered under discussion of item 10.

11.3 The Cabinet Member of Corporate Services and Innovation responded to the Councillors' queries:

- The Council's Strategic Property Asset Management Framework 2021/22 to 2026/27 provided the policy basis for decision making on property basis stated at paragraph 6.2 that "when a property becomes an impediment to delivery of quality services it will be improved, removed or disposed of". The Policy stated at paragraph 6.5 stated that the Council "challenges use of its property on an ongoing basis, reviewing the use and future needs of property assets and their service delivery, and there is a continued emphasis on minimising the extend of the property estate retained for operational purpose".
- There were no alternative operational requirements for the Wensum Lodge site, and it was on this basis that the disposal of the site was taken to Cabinet.

#### 11.4 Councillors calling-in the decision questioned the Cabinet Member and officers:

- When it was agreed, the development of Wensum Lodge fulfilled the aims of Better Together for Norfolk. Cllr Webb asked what had changed since this time. The Cabinet Member of Corporate Services and Innovation replied that since the Covid-19 Pandemic changes had been seen in the requirements for work and learning spaces and in funding. The Director of Property noted that there was also now a better understanding of the cost involved.
- Cllr Webb asked if discussions had been held with organisations regarding funding the redevelopment of the site. The Director of Property replied that discussions had been held with organisations as well as looking into national funding options. It was clear that the Council did not need the site; declaring it surplus meant that discussions could be held with colleges and Universities to see if they needed the site.
- It was noted that some tutors and learners had described the site as a maze and found it hard to drop off items for courses which required equipment. It was also noted that it was a difficult site for disabled learners to attend.
- Conversations with community groups who may want to take on the site were welcomed.
- Cllr Webb felt that the number of learners who travelled to access the site was testament of the facilities it provided.
- Cllr Brociek-Coulton asked how much time went into considering improvement or re-use of the site, citing paragraph 2.2 of the Strategic Property Asset Management Framework 2021/22 to 2026/27: "Work with Members and partners to identify opportunities for collaboration in the use, reuse and potential for meanwhile use of property", which she felt had not been carried out. The Cabinet Member of Corporate Services and Innovation noted paragraph 6.6 of the Plan which stated: "In the event of a property asset becoming surplus to an individual service need the Director of Property working with the Corporate Property Strategy Group (a Director led senior Officer Group representing all directorates) ascertains whether other service areas have an unmet need that could be addressed by re-using the property asset for that service. Once it is confirmed there is no further County Council requirement, Cabinet is asked to formally declare property assets surplus and then they are disposed of". She was confident that this process had been followed.
- The Cabinet Member of Corporate Services and Innovation confirmed that the £5.71m set aside for redevelopment of Wensum Lodge would be taken back to Cabinet for a decision on its alternative use. Corlett asked if this funding should be used for capital schemes with other community and cultural benefits. The Cabinet Member of Corporate Services and Innovation replied that it

would be inappropriate for her to look at this without a business case.

11.5 Members and substitute Members of the Committee questioned the Cabinet Member and officers:

- A Committee Member noted that the Council did not have a need for Wensum Lodge and the process followed to dispose of the site was the same as for other sites. Cllr Emma Corlett clarified that Councillors had called this disposal in as they did not agree with the rationale for the disposal.
- The Vice-Chair felt that there was not evidence that the site was surplus to council requirements as there was not yet evidence as to where some of the services delivered there would be delivered and if they could be delivered effectively elsewhere.
- The Director of Property confirmed that the cost did not inform the decision to dispose of the site; it was because it was not needed by Adult Education and other services also confirmed they did not need the site. Because of this it was declared as surplus to requirements.
- It was noted that since discussions about redevelopment of the site held in 2019 there had been the Covid-19 pandemic; changes to the ways that people meet, learn and carry out business had been seen when coming out of the pandemic.
- A Committee Member felt that passing on the building to another user would allow its use to continue and protect its heritage.
- A Committee Member queried the future of the music house which was on the site of Wensum Lodge. The Director of Property confirmed that discussions had been held with Norwich City Council who owned freehold of the site and, pending the outcome of discussions, this would be returned to them.

11.6 Cllr Maxine Webb summed up:

- It was not known if all the courses currently delivered at Wensum Lodge could be delivered elsewhere or if users would attend them in other locations.
- All of the work of the working group set up in 2019 had not been seen.
- She asked for this decision to be taken back to Cabinet with full public consultation and with partners to look at viability of the site.

11.7 Cllr Brian Long proposed that Scrutiny Committee note the call-in but take no further action, seconded by Cllr Carl Annison.

11.8 With 10 votes for and 3 against, Scrutiny Committee **RESOLVED** to note the call-in but take no further action.

## **12 Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme**

12.1 The annexed report (at item 12) was received.

12.2 The Democratic Support and Scrutiny Manager confirmed that he would take away the actions raised during the discussion about the Climate Change Strategy and what the action plans would look like.

12.3 It was reported that the August 2023 meeting would be cancelled.

12.4 **RESOLVED**

That the Committee:

Note the current forward work programme as set out in the appendix to the report

The meeting concluded at 14:11 pm

**Chair**