

Cabinet
3 July 2023
Public & Local Member Questions

	Public Question Time
6.1	<p>Question from Elisabeth Traverse The Council is having to destroy at least 3,000 trees on our roads because of ash die back and other diseases. What is the council doing about replacing these trees with more suitable ones?</p> <p>Response from the Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste Where necessary we make safe or, regrettably, have to fell trees along the highway to keep property and people safe. The vast majority (82%) of these felled trees are located on land not owned by the County Council, and as part of our work we establish with our own Highways/Property Services and other landowners whether they can be replaced. Where tree replacement is not possible, we are working through the Forestry Commission funding stream, Local Authority Treescapes, to secure ways to increase tree numbers in other more appropriate locations. This includes planting tree species resistant to disease and resilient to climate change. This tree planting is additional to our 1 million trees pledge.</p> <p>Supplementary question from Elisabeth Traverse Is the Council setting up a tree replacement fund?</p> <p>Response from the Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste There is no tree replacement fund as such. However, we have applied for Local Authority Treescapes funding last year and this year. This money, with some match funding from the Council and other partners, seeks to address the net loss of trees from ash die back and other diseases.</p>
6.2	<p>Question from Richard Adcock With the increase & push towards Electric Vehicles, have the fire service been overlooked for their personal safety/ training & equipment to cope with any situation they may be confronted with & to protect the public?</p> <p>Response from the Cabinet Member for Communities and Partnerships Thankfully, incidents involving electric vehicles are rare. These vehicles have lots of internal safety measures to try and prevent issues occurring, however they can still happen. We continue to work closely with the National Fire Chief's Council to make sure that we are ready to deal with this type of incident. Current firefighting techniques would protect fire fighters and members of the public and we have suitable training and PPE in place but the current approaches may result in more defensive firefighting tactics in certain situations.</p> <p>Things we are doing in Norfolk include proper questioning at the time of call so we can adequately resource an incident quickly. We have an increased "pre-determined attendance" (how many resources we send) from a confirmed EV car fire and this includes an additional appliance, level2 officer and HAZMAT officer, for specific advice, as well as consideration for our environmental protection unit.</p> <p>Our teams have a good operational understanding about what specific hazards are involved. In addition, our new risk and policy group manager will be reviewing our overall response to this type of incident.</p> <p>Our Fire safety teams work with local planners to make sure that firefighting</p>

arrangements are considered when charge points are being put into new builds. But current legislation needs to be updated around this fast paced technology, which we have raised with some local MPs.

6.3

Question from Prof. David Evans

The recent acceptance of Norfolk County Council's Climate Strategy by Cabinet is welcome. Its implementation within an urgent timeframe is required. Following the analysis and knowledge learned to produce the Strategy, is it not now timely for Norfolk County Council to recognise and declare a Climate Emergency?

Response from the Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste

Thank you for welcoming the new strategy, which has achieved widespread support.

In April 2019, the Council unanimously adopted a declaration that "Norfolk County Council recognises the serious impact of climate change globally and the need for urgent action".

The council committed to supporting the delivery of the Government's 25 year plan to improve the environment, welcomed the introduction of the Environment Act and committed to reducing unnecessary use of resources, minimising waste, reducing our impact on the world, and shaping a more efficient, sustainable and competitive economy.

The Council agreed to lead by example and demonstrate our actions and responsibilities in tackling climate change and recognised that taking action now can help to achieve long-term sustainable economic growth from low carbon and green industries in Norfolk.

Making a further declaration four years on would not serve any useful purpose. Our emphasis must be on continuing to take action to mitigate emissions and adapt to changing weather patterns.

Supplementary question from Prof. David Evans

At Cabinet it has been said that the Council "walks the walk, not talks the talk". How will Councillors on the Cabinet evidence the success of their "walk" and that it is not just "talk"?

Response from the Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste

It is imperative that the Council translates its Climate Strategy into practical actions with the means in place for councillor and public accountability over its delivery.

At present, a dashboard for reporting our estate emissions that count towards our 2030 net zero estate target is available on the Council's climate change webpage. The dashboard shows the Council's annual estate emissions broken down across key categories such as those from fossil fuel heating, building electricity, streetlight electricity, and vehicle fleet emissions.

Updates have also been given to Cabinet on progress towards the Council's Environmental Policy (which includes the Council's existing commitments around climate change). The last of these was the Net Zero and Natural Norfolk Progress Update delivered to Cabinet in April 2022.

Looking ahead, an annual report will be prepared for the relevant select committee to review delivery progress towards the new Climate Strategy as a whole. While many of the Council's activities relevant to the strategy will be brought to members separately through the relevant committees, the role of this item will be to consider the range of initiatives related to the Climate Strategy all together. This will enable members to assess progress, identify gaps to delivery and introduce any changes needed going forward.

6.4

Question from Tessa Gee

How will Norfolk County Council influence others, for example schools, to ensure buildings and operations are zero-carbon?

Response from the Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste

In terms of school construction, we are in the process of letting a new framework for contracting school builds over the next four years. The design specification of schools built under this framework will go beyond building regulations in terms of energy performance, the installation of low carbon heating systems and on-site renewables - aspiring towards net zero in operation. Furthermore, contractors who join that framework will need to have a carbon reduction plan in place for their business operations that aligns with the UK's net zero 2050 commitment.

There are around 200 schools in Norfolk where we still have a role in long-term maintenance through a funding arrangement with the Department for Education (known as 'maintained' schools). Where schools have become academies, formal leasing arrangements are in place for the land and buildings to the academy trust who are fully responsible for operating and maintaining the schools. Large Academy Trusts are within scope of regulations requiring disclosure of energy and carbon information with their directors' (trustees') report with narrative of measures to improve energy efficiency.

Decarbonising the Council's maintained school building stock is a significant challenge. As a recent National Audit Office report highlighted, there has been limited funding available to local authorities from central government for the refurbishment and maintenance of school buildings. Furthermore, covid restrictions and infection control has been the overriding recent priority for schools .

The Council is also deploying some of the maintenance funding it receives to commission surveys of school buildings to understand the works required to improve energy efficiency and cut carbon emissions. These can support bids to the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme to secure external finance towards carbon reduction works. A programme of wider engagement with schools is also in planning, with Cabinet in May resolving that the Council will undertake workshops with schools specifically with the purpose of re-engaging on the theme of how to progress with carbon reduction.

Our priorities and focus on the wider built environment where we have less direct influence is outlined in the Climate Strategy on pages 69 to 75.

6.5

Question from Mary Curzon

Norfolk County Council plans to plant one million trees by 2025. It appears that this number also will include hedge plants. So far, 276,293 trees and hedge plants have been planted, of which 112,064 are on Norfolk County Council owned land. How many of these newly planted trees and hedge plants are still alive?

Response from the Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste

Of the 276,293 trees, some 180,000 have just been planted and therefore it is not yet possible to know the survival rate. But we will be monitoring these closely this current growing season. The survival rate for previous years has been high and where we have seen losses, we ensure that these trees are replaced as agreed from the outset when we fund the work.

Supplementary question from Mary Curzon

What processes do Norfolk County Council have in place to ensure that the trees are maintained and survive?

Response from the Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste

Where trees are planted on County Farms, agreement is reached with the tenants to maintain these trees. In other locations, working with communities and partners, we evaluate all proposals in the round, including agreeing the establishment and the long-term future maintenance of the trees. Our decision to proceed with planting is conditional on agreeing with communities and partners how they will ensure that the trees are cared for in the future. This includes replanting, if necessary.

6.6

Question from Sarah Eglinton

Many Norfolk residents were forced to choose between heating and eating as a result of skyrocketing gas prices last winter. At the same time, we watch as the climate crisis escalates. All the while, Norfolk CC continues to back the culprits responsible by investing pensions in fossil fuels. Climate breakdown and energy insecurity are both symptoms of an unstable and unjust energy system, founded on fossil fuels. The crisis will only intensify if we don't divest from fossil fuels. There is no mention of divestment in Norfolk CC's Climate Strategy. What steps are being taken by Norfolk CC to divest all their investments in fossil fuels?

Response from the Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste

The Norfolk Pension Fund is independent of Norfolk County Council and believes in voting and engagement with investee companies to improve their performance and requires its fund managers to holistically embed Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) considerations in their investment approaches. It does not adopt a policy of exclusion for any mainstream industrial sector. This approach is fully documented on its website www.norfolkpensionfund.org. The Fund takes a holistic approach to considering carbon emissions across its portfolio. Third party benchmarking is published every six months. This shows that the carbon emissions and climate risk metrics are materially better than benchmark global indices. In addition, the Fund invests in renewable and energy transition assets through its real asset portfolios as part of its diversified investment portfolio securing the pensions of around one hundred thousand current and former local government employees.

	<p>Supplementary question from Sarah Eglinton What is Norfolk CC's target date for full divestment from fossil fuel investments?</p> <p>Response from the Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste As stated previously the Fund does not have a policy of exclusion for any industrial sector.</p>
6.7	<p>Question from Graeme Gee Can Norfolk County Council directly, or by influence, ensure that artificial grass is not used in schools, play areas, and anywhere on their own estate?</p> <p>Response from the Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste Outside of the school estates the Council does not use artificial grass on properties where it is the freeholder and occupier.</p> <p>The Council would be able to use its influence to discourage the use of artificial grass on the schools' estate. However, it cannot enforce this position even on sites where the Council is still the Responsible Body. Local Authority Maintained schools' governing boards run their own sites and have responsibility to ensure it supports learning. Schools frequently install artificial grass to ensure there is suitable access for children to outside curriculum especially for early years and foundation stage. Usually, it is in areas where real grass is difficult to maintain and all year round access is often compromised.</p> <p>Larger 3G pitches are almost exclusively only on high school sites. All but one of these in Norfolk are part of an academy trust, and the remaining one is a foundation school where the governing board is the freeholder. The standard academy lease terms do not allow the Council to add any conditions of this nature. There are other bodies such as Sport England, which encourages the provision of sporting pitches on school sites.</p>
6.8	<p>Question from Verna Salter Norfolk CC's Climate Strategy recognises the importance of decarbonisation of the transport sector and as the Local Highways Authority NCC has an important role in supporting the decarbonisation of the transport sector through the provision of sustainable infrastructure. How is that consistent with the construction of the unnecessary, and environmentally destructive, Norwich Western Link Road?</p> <p>Response from the Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport Reducing our impact on the environment and climate is a priority for the Council, and it is a key consideration in what we do. But there are other things we need to consider to do the best we can for Norfolk and its residents and businesses. These include ensuring our county can cope with population and housing growth, supporting the local economy and acting on existing transport problems by making sure Norfolk has the infrastructure it needs.</p> <p>Improvements to our transport infrastructure support all kinds of journeys, including walking and cycling, public transport, emergency services and deliveries of goods and services. Removing traffic congestion from local roads and communities</p>

makes these safer and more pleasant places to live, walk and cycle, and improves air quality close to people's homes.

Supplementary question from Verna Salter

Other than EV charging points, what sustainable infrastructure will be provided?

Response from the Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport

The report presented to Cabinet today on the Transport for Norwich update sets out the broad range of projects and improvements that have been delivered across the Norwich area. The Council has been highly successful in bidding for external funding through the Transport for Norwich strategy. Over the last five years, the authority has secured more than £150m for sustainable transport improvements in and around the city, which have cut bus journey times, increased active travel, improved air quality and reduced carbon emissions.

6.9

Question from Charlotte Chamberlain

Warm words don't make warm homes.

We've had small helpings of alphabet soup – promised warmth of a HUG here, chance to catch a BUS there, be a LAD and SHDF for those in social housing: each promised little and delivered less.

The East of England had 30% of all retrofit measures installed under HUG1. 773 measures out of a national total of 2611. That's measures, NOT individual homes. At this rate how will the 432,500 homes in Norfolk be upgraded by 2050?

Response from the Cabinet Member for Environment & Waste

Domestic homes account for around 20% of Norfolk's emissions and you rightly point out that accelerating retrofitting is a significant challenge for moving to a low carbon future. Domestic energy performance certificates show that 62% of dwellings across Norfolk have an energy rating of D or less (Energy Performance of Building Certificates in England and Wales: July to September 2022) As a local authority we will seek the right funding opportunities to support our partners in the retrofit agenda. We do not directly own domestic housing stock so our influencing power to decarbonise domestic buildings across Norfolk is significantly limited but support for residents can be secured through the [Norfolk Warm Homes](#) website.

Supplementary Question from Charlotte Chamberlain

What local level of funding and skills provision does this Council believe would enable Norfolk to meet the government's 2050 Net Zero Carbon Strategy target on retrofitting homes?

Response from the Cabinet Member for Environment & Waste

The Council is currently carrying out a comprehensive workforce analysis of the Retrofit sector, assessing the skills and training requirements of sector to meet Net-Zero objectives. This work programme includes clarity on the current deployment rate of retrofit measures across County and District areas (Air/Ground source heat pumps, heat insulation included), Annual installations required in

domestic/non-domestic properties to meet Net-Zero objectives, in addition to workforce, skills and qualification demands in the sector.

In addition to the current Council investment in the skills infrastructure, we continue to work closely with Norfolk further education (FE) and private training providers, establishing the training provision to meet current and projected workforce requirements. We aim to maximise funding opportunities for the county through national programmes, securing ongoing resources for retrofit training, most recently exhibited through the securing retrofit funding through the Department of Education Skills Bootcamp and Local Skills Improvement Partnership programmes – currently being delivered across the County.

6.10

Question from Sarah Burston

It is recognised that extreme weather events, that will occur more often due to climate change, have a more significant effect on vulnerable people. What tangible plans do Norfolk County Council have in place to protect and support this community?

Response from the Cabinet Member for Environment & Waste

This risk is considered by the Norfolk Resilience Forum and by key services such as Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service as part of their overall planning process. An example of the approach being taken by the Council is detailed by the response from the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care.

Response from the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care

Thank you for your question.

We receive notification of extreme weather alerts from the Met office which is shared across the health and social care system. Our older people, physical disability and learning disability services are integrated with community NHS services and our mental health service is co-located with NHS mental health provision and we work in cooperation with the NHS and other partners such as District Councils on adverse events, such as periods of extreme weather. There are also robust resilience and emergency plans in place to support our vulnerable people and communities as a wider NCC offer. The plans are constantly under review and updated regularly. Examples of the support NCC have provided and have plans to support in future occurrences include:

Flood risk – working with Norfolk Police, other agencies, and families to safeguard vulnerable local people at home including staffing rescue centres, assisting relocation of Care Home residents, visiting, and assessing people at home who may be unable to keep themselves safe or assess the risk, arranging additional support and services or transport to safe spaces. NCC officers from North and East locality have been involved in this activity on several occasions.

Extreme heat/field fire – in West Norfolk in 2022 supporting vulnerable people whose properties were affected by fire from a field blaze due to extreme heat. NCC officer support with assistance to link with agencies around temporary housing and emotional and practical support provided.

	<p>Power Outage – identifying vulnerable people and working with community health providers to ensure timely responses are planned and support available should people need to live without power for any period of time to reduce the risk to their vulnerability and safety.</p>
6.11	<p>Question from Jonathan Smith Did the research underpinning the Council's Climate Strategy include an analysis of the benefits of CO₂?</p> <p>Response from the Cabinet Member for Environment & Waste No, as a local authority, we do not hold our own evidence base relating to climate change. However, as a guide to the evidence we have drawn on, I would refer you to the publications of the UK's independent, Statutory Climate Change Committee.</p>
6.12	<p>Question from Tina Johnson Despite South Norfolk and Broadland District Councils declaring their participation in "No Mow May", Norfolk County Council proceeded with a cutting regime of verges and other areas. This destroyed pollinator plants and decimated habitats at a critical time of year. The cutting was in breach of your policy that "We only cut grass verges for safety reasons, not appearance". Norfolk CC states "Roadside verges are cut for road safety purposes to maintain visibility at junctions and to provide room for people to walk on the pavement", in the recent regime this did not apply at a multitude of places. Why does Norfolk CC act in breach of these conditions?</p> <p>Response from the Cabinet Member for Highways Infrastructure & Transport The Council did not participate in "No Mow May" as the timing for grass cuts to the highway verges varies each year. This timing is dependent on growing conditions and ensures that highway safety is maintained.</p> <p>A report, titled "Greenways to Greenspaces - Green Travel and Green Networks along our Highways Corridors" was discussed at the Infrastructure and Development Committee on 18th January 2023. This outlines previous commitments, as well as progress updates. Part of the commitments outlined include developing a new Roadside Verge Management Policy and the cutting policy is being reviewed as part of this work.</p> <p>A change was made to the second rural cut (usually carried out in August/September) to cut only junctions and visibility splays for C & U class roads, while A and B roads are cut as usual. This not only provided a financial saving, but helps support our pollinator ambitions.</p> <p>Supplementary Question from Tina Johnson How does this recent excessive and unnecessary verge cutting comply with Norfolk County Council's Biodiversity and Climate Strategy policies?</p> <p>Response from the Cabinet Member for Highways Infrastructure & Transport There is a fine balance between ensuring highway safety and supporting the environment. Each year the growing season is subtly different. The weather this</p>

	<p>year caused significant early year growth of the roadside verges, which is why the cutting could not be delayed further.</p> <p>However, our grass cutting operations are only one aspect of the Council's work in this area. Roadside Nature Reserves (RNRs) are cut later in the year to allow the rare species to both flower and seed for the next season. The Council's Pollinator Action Plan was reviewed at the Infrastructure and Development Committee on 14th July 2021. As part of this, a commitment has been made to increase the number of Roadside Nature Reserves (RNRs) across the county to 300 sites with the purpose of improving the environment for pollinators.</p> <p>In addition to the above which contributes towards the Council's Biodiversity and Climate Strategy policies, the Greenways to Greenspaces - Green Travel and Green Networks along our Highways Corridors report outlines previous commitments, as well as progress updates and how grass cutting is a key component of the delivery of this strategy.</p>
6.13	<p>Question from Daniel Douglas First Bus is withdrawing a council tendered service 37B on the 23 July 2023 which serves Lakenham and Mulbarton on Evening and Sundays. Will this be replaced with a similar level of service from the 24th of July?</p> <p>Response from the Cabinet Member for Highways Infrastructure & Transport The service 37B is a commercial service, not a council tendered service, although the Council does provide some financial support in terms of a de minimis payment. First have submitted 2 registrations – one to cancel the 37B but then also another one that re-registers it within the core 37 service, therefore there will be no change to service they are just tidying up the paperwork.</p>
6.14	<p>Question from Willem Buttinger How are Norfolk County Council maintaining council-owned land and road verges to increase biodiversity?</p> <p>Response from the Cabinet Member for Environment & Waste Roadside Nature Reserves (RNRs) are cut later in the year to allow the rare species to both flower and seed for the next season. The Council's Pollinator Action Plan was reviewed at the Infrastructure and Development Committee on 14th July 2021 and as part of this, a commitment was made to increase the number of Roadside Nature Reserves (RNRs) across the county to 300 sites with the purpose of improving the environment for pollinators. Combined with a reduction in the frequency of grass cutting over the past decade, these measures help increase biodiversity across the county.</p> <p>Supplementary Question from Willem Buttinger Has Norfolk County Council stopped the use of glyphosate on its estate and road verges?</p> <p>Response from the Cabinet Member for Environment & Waste The Council is committed to minimising the use of herbicides, including those containing glyphosate, to control weeds or other undesirable plant species on its</p>

	<p>managed land, whilst still maintaining safe and healthy spaces fit for purpose and appropriate use by its communities.</p> <p>A new glyphosate policy and Integrated Weed Management Plan (IWMP) has been put in place for this year which has seen a significant reduction in the amount of Glyphosate being used. The Council continues to use glyphosate for treating of kerb lines and footways, in order to keep the highway safe, for example to reduce the risk to the public of trips and falls. Glyphosate is not used on roadside verges. Glyphosate usage will be closely monitored over the course of the summer in line with the policy. Any new developments in alternative products this area will also be explored.</p>
6.15	<p>Question from Frances Martin The proposal does not address the issue of art courses where both equipment and technical support are needed - please can the cabinet reconsider this wholesale sell off and look again at how a creative hub can be established to continue the courses at Wensum Lodge?</p> <p>Response from the Cabinet Member for Community and Partnerships The previous proposal for a creative hub did not progress due to increasing costs and changing habits of adult learners. The initial design estimates undertaken by external consultants had a cost of £20 million, which will have increased significantly due to inflation, particularly of building materials. Also, with a significant shift towards adult learners accessing courses online or in their local community, the proposed usage for the building has become unviable.</p> <p>We remain committed to delivering a range of learning opportunities and courses will continue. We know that some courses need specialist equipment and our work to secure suitable locations for future courses is well progressed and, should Cabinet agree the recommendation in the report, we will confirm new locations to learners as soon as possible. In the meantime, courses will continue to be delivered from Wensum Lodge until the end of this calendar year.</p> <p>Supplementary Question from Frances Martin The issue of how to continue to employ tutors in the arts area is not explained, with reference to above, how can these popular courses still run?</p> <p>Response from the Cabinet Member for Community and Partnerships We remain committed to delivering a range of learning opportunities and courses will continue. Our work to secure suitable locations for future courses is well progressed and, should Cabinet agree the recommendation in the report, we will confirm new locations to learners as soon as possible. In the meantime, courses will continue to be delivered from Wensum Lodge until the end of this calendar year.</p>
6.16	<p>Question from Kate Vogler The proposal to declare Wensum Lodge Complex, 169 King Street NR1 1QW (4109/041) surplus to Council requirements is short sighted.</p> <p>The workshops there are already equipped with specialist tools; they offer access to skills which are not available elsewhere , nor are they easily transferrable to another local venue. They would be lost to the county and its residents.</p>

Has the council fully explored how investment and correct management of Wensum Lodge could be hugely beneficial for Norfolk residents financially, creatively and in mental well being?

Response from the Cabinet Member for Community and Partnerships

The previous proposal for a creative hub did not progress due to increasing costs and changing habits of adult learners. The initial design estimates undertaken by external consultants had a cost of £20 million, which will have increased significantly due to inflation, particularly of building materials. Also, with a significant shift towards adult learners accessing courses online or in their local community, the proposed usage for the building became unviable.

We have invested in two new specialist construction training centres, where there is a high need for specialist tools and equipment. Our new Hellesdon centre opened earlier this year and is successfully running courses, and our King's Lynn centre opens later this year.

We remain committed to delivering a range of learning opportunities and courses will continue. We know that some courses need specialist equipment and our work to secure suitable locations for future courses is well progressed and, should Cabinet agree the recommendation in the report, we will confirm new locations to learners as soon as possible. In the meantime, courses will continue to be delivered from Wensum Lodge until the end of this calendar year.

Supplementary Question from Kate Vogler

This site has a high resale value.

Is the council's proposal to sell this beautiful riverside building driven by monetary gain rather than recognition of the educational value to both city and county?

Response from the Cabinet Member for Corporate Services and Growth

The decision to cease services at Wensum Lodge is set out in the paper presented by Cllr Dewsbury. It notes the decrease in the number of learners at the site, as the Council delivers Adult Education in more accessible locations within communities across the County.

6.17

Question from Kay Pringle

To ask Norfolk County Council why they are choosing to fail and abandon, without democratic public consultation, their 2019 commitment to sustain, as per their duty, the historic long-standing public amenity building of Wensum House, King Street by pursuing their pre-agreed viable creative hub business model and reinvigorating this valued creative and learning asset within the city centre, and which Norwich citizens were expecting through that promise?

Response from the Cabinet Member for Corporate Services and Growth

The previous proposal for the Wensum Lodge did not progress due to increasing costs and changing habits of adult learners. The initial design estimates undertaken by external consultants had a cost of £20 million, which will have increased significantly due to inflation, particularly of building materials. Also, with a significant shift towards adult learners accessing courses online or in their local community, the proposed usage for the building has become unviable.

Supplementary Question from Kay Pringle

Does the council accept their proposed about-turn will significantly harm local citizens' creative and learning needs, especially those with special needs - note the site has the only adapted river mooring for wheelchair enabled boats for disabled people to access the Wensum

Response from the Cabinet Member for Community and Partnerships

The Wensum Lodge site is not accessible or suitable for many of our learners. Delivery of Norwich based courses from locations other than Wensum Lodge will enable us to secure space with greater physical accessibility, easier access to parking (including for blue badge holders) and closer access to public transport. We want all our learners to be able to access suitable learning space that can meet their needs. This is not possible at Wensum Lodge.

6.18

Question from Stephanie Northern

Why is the council considering adding to King Street's woes by handing yet another precious asset - Wensum Lodge with the historic Music House - to the private sector? King St is already blighted with three large sites that have been supposedly under development for years. One - St Anne's Wharf phase 2 - is stalled, its fate unknown. Two - the Ferry Boat Inn - is proceeding at the pace of a very slow snail. Three - Bennetts Building next to Dragon Hall - has yet to apply for planning permission. Rather than becoming another decaying building site, Wensum Lodge should become the cultural jewel in the crown that the city and county were promised.

Response from the Cabinet Member for Community and Partnerships

The decision to cease services at Wensum Lodge is set out in the paper presented to Cabinet today. It notes the decrease in the number of learners at the site, as the Council delivers Adult Education in more accessible locations within communities across the County.

The previous proposal for the Wensum Lodge did not progress due to increasing costs and changing habits of adult learners. The initial design estimates undertaken by external consultants had a cost of £20 million, which will have increased significantly due to inflation, particularly of building materials. Furthermore, with a significant shift towards adult learners accessing courses online or in their local community, the proposed usage for the building has become unviable.

6.19

Question from Helen Davis

how are you planning to improve rural bus services in Norfolk in order to encourage more people to utilise them? Thank you

Response from the Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport

Since receiving nearly £50m in funding for our Bus Service Improvement Plan in November 2022, we have already improved and added services from and within rural areas. For example, new Sunday and evening services have been added between Swanton Morley and villages into Norwich, Sunday services have been introduced in Grimston, Gayton and West Winch into King's Lynn, and services have been increased in frequency in several other locations.

Any service improvements require funding and we were fortunate to be awarded the £50m for our Bus Service Improvement Plan, unlike many other local authorities. We are continuing to develop further plans for improved services, ensuring that this short-term funding is directed to the right locations where services have a high chance of being commercially sustainable in the long-term.

Cabinet
3 July 2023
Local Member Questions

	Member Question Time
7.1	<p>Question from Cllr David Sayers What is the estimated expenditure on education provision for permanently excluded children, considering the need for specialist tuition or specialist places. What measures or efforts are implemented to facilitate the successful reintegration of these pupils back into mainstream education?</p> <p>Response from the Cabinet Member for Children's Services Funding related to the education of children who have been permanently excluded is provided or within the High Needs Block budget, within the overall Dedicated School Grant. There are two main elements of our expenditure. One of these relates to the commissioning of specialist provision within the 'Short Stay School for Norfolk' who provide education across their 4 bases within total annual funding of £7.8 million for up to 350 full time equivalent places each year. In addition Children's Services provides further support, through tuition and e-learning, to help ensure needs are met, with an annual cost of approximately £1.1m. Our approach to reintegration is facilitated through the Norfolk Fair Access panels. All secondary schools are active members of these panels and primary schools are included as necessary. Successful reintegration is based upon effective partnership working between the receiving school, the Short Stay School for Norfolk and Children's Services. Existing arrangements on reintegration are being reviewed as part of our Local First Inclusion programme and importantly strengthening our partnership approach to support children and young people earlier to reduce exclusion happening in the first place.</p> <p>Supplementary question from Cllr David Sayers What measures will Norfolk County Council take to address the significant exodus of under 40s from the teaching profession, as revealed by recent Department for Education statistics, and how will the council ensure that children in Norfolk receive a high quality education despite the shortage of qualified teachers, especially in critical subjects like maths and physics?</p> <p>Response from the Cabinet Member for Children's Services All schools in Norfolk are either Local Authority Maintained (community, voluntary aided or voluntary controlled) or part of an Academy Trust as an academy (a school that has converted or been sponsored by an academy trust) or free school (a new academy school).</p>

Governing bodies and academy trust boards are responsible for the recruitment and retention of staff. The local authority can take an advisory role and has a legal entitlement to do so in some cases.

For community, voluntary controlled and maintained nursery schools the Local Authority is the employer of staff and has a legal entitlement to provide advice to schools in relation to the appointment of teachers at the school.

For foundation and voluntary aided schools, the foundation trust (usually one of the three dioceses in Norfolk) is the employer. The dioceses do not have the same legal advisory rights as the local authority, but in most cases an agreement will be in place.

For academies and free schools, the academy trust is the employer. Academy trusts can choose to control recruitment centrally or delegate this to individual academies.

NCC work closely with the local Teaching School Hubs, The Julian Teaching School Hub and the Inspiration Trust Teaching School Hub to support the promotion and signposting of key professional development, such as the opportunities provided by Angles Maths Hub and the Cambridge Maths Hub (which serves Kings Lynn & the West of Norfolk)

In response to the significant challenges in recruitment and retention facing Norfolk schools, NCC allocated capacity during this year to map out the current position and challenges with regards to the school workforce, with an initial focus on LA maintained schools. This was with a view to better understanding the local challenges

Working inside the parameters of factors within NCC's realm of influence the priorities identified include:; the creation of teacher talent pools (including a recruitment focus on attracting teachers into the county); Early Career Teachers; developing & promoting the benefits of flexible working, better enabling access to relevant professional development; and the development of coaching programmes and improved Headteacher induction to support recruitment and retention of leadership.

Recruitment and retention of capacity have been recognised as key priorities for the system in the framework published recently by NCC for a new Learning Strategy for Norfolk. Through that strategy we will deliver sustained action alongside education leaders over the coming years.

7.2

Question from Cllr Rob Colwell

What action is this council taking over the concerns at Heacham beach being designated 'poor' and the 'no bathing advisory' notice, with citizen science results showing very high levels of E coli?

Response from the Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste

This is not a County Council responsibility.

7.3

Question from Cllr Lucy Shires

	<p>Last month, there was a national outage that restricted people from making emergency calls. This council tweeted that residents should report in-person to a fire station to report an emergency. Will this council review its contingency plans and community resilience in case such an outage occurs again?</p> <p>Response from the Cabinet Member for Community and Partnerships Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service has internally reviewed the actions it took following the unexpected 999 outage on 26/06/23. We are also feeding our learning into the multi-agency reviews facilitated by the Norfolk resilience forum and nationally by BT. We have developed an initial action plan should a 999 outage occur again at short notice. This will be further supplemented by learning from our partner agency reviews. Our external public messaging process is included within the action plan to provide alternative contact number arrangements and to reassure the communities of Norfolk should the 999 facility fail again.</p>
7.4	<p>Question from Cllr Brian Watkins A report to Cabinet this morning recommends that no further work on the Norwich Western Link should be carried out for three months, in order to reduce the costs of the project. With increasing doubts about whether the funding from the DfT will ever be forthcoming, shouldn't the Council use this period of time to 'bite the bullet', and start considering alternative measures for tackling traffic and congestion problems on the western side of the city?</p> <p>Response from the Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport The report does not recommend that no further work should be carried out on the Norwich Western Link (NWL) for three months, but rather that activity on the project be reduced while we await a decision on the Outline Business Case.</p> <p>The report also sets out that we're aware that other local authorities are in a similar position to us in awaiting funding commitments for their infrastructure projects and that we have a strong business case that demonstrates the NWL will provide high value for money, according to Department for Transport criteria. So I disagree that there are increasing doubts that this commitment will be made, and it's important that we are well-placed to respond and to finalise the planning application documents when a decision is made.</p> <p>Assessments carried out by the project team have shown that a new road link between the A47 and Broadland Northway is the most effective way of tackling the transport issues to the west of Norwich, and meeting the project objectives which were agreed with input from local communities. I am committed to doing everything I can to get this important project for Norfolk delivered.</p> <p>Second question from Cllr Brian Watkins The public of Norfolk will no doubt welcome new Government legislation to remove charges for DIY household waste at recycling centres. However, this will undoubtedly come at a cost to the Council with the county's council taxpayers likely to bear the brunt. Does the Cabinet member for the Environment agree with me that this is yet another example of the Conservative Government giving with the one hand and taking away with the other?</p>

	<p>Response from the Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste We await further clarification on this matter from Government so that we can make a detailed assessment on the future requirement and associated costs. However, in the meantime it is useful to clarify that the recent proposal presented by Government is not to remove charges for DIY waste, but is instead to require a weekly free allowance of up to two 50 litre rubble bags or one item a week such as a bathtub or shower screen, at a frequency of four visits over a four-week period.</p>
7.5	<p>Question from Cllr Dan Roper Members have recently been receiving complaints concerning the frequency of overgrown verges. As much as we support pollinators, has this council stretched things too far to achieve savings?</p> <p>Response from the Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport There is a fine balance between ensuring highway safety and supporting the environment. In addition, each year the growing season is subtly different. The weather this year caused significant early growth of the roadside verges and we are aware this led to a number of complaints. However, to ensure highway safety the rural grass cut started in mid-May and is now largely complete. The timing of the next cut will be dependent on weather conditions and growing condition, but this usually will start in August.</p> <p>This strategy balances highway safety with promoting biodiversity along our environmentally important highway corridors.</p>
7.6	<p>Question from Cllr Tim Adams Has this council met its pothole repair targets for 2022/23?</p> <p>Response from the Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport For 2022/23, the authority's target to repair 96% of priority A defects with 2 hours (Transport Asset Management Plan policy) was achieved with a figure of 99.4%. The performance figures for the other category of repairs (PB, PC & PD) were also all above their target levels</p>
7.7	<p>Question from Cllr Emma Corlett Will the Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport use the time between now and October to produce the much-needed sustainable Plan B to tackle rat running in communities west of Norwich and a costed and impact assessed risk route to manage the potential £40m or more revenue effect when the Norwich western link scheme is abandoned? With increasing, delays, costs and prospects of the scheme not going ahead residents in the area need reassuring they are not going to be victims of the NWL failing.</p> <p>Response from the Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport The approach that has been recommended over the next three months is a sensible one, enabling us to reduce spending while meaning we will still be well-</p>

placed to finalise the planning application documents when we do receive approval from central government.

It is the Norwich Western Link that is much needed and, with our strong business case, there is no reason to think we won't receive a funding commitment from central government. We are in regular contact with representatives of the communities worst affected by traffic congestion to the west of Norwich and they remain keen for us to get the Norwich Western Link delivered as soon as possible – and that's what we're focused on doing.

Supplementary Question from Cllr Emma Corlett

It has been a year since the last update of the overall scheme costs for the NWL were published. In the light of delays and raging inflation in the construction sector will the Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport spell out how much of the contingency built into that last estimate that has been committed, for what purposes, and what proportion remains available, or explain why he is not releasing that information?

Response from the Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport

We have stated in the July Cabinet report that an updated financial position, which will include any re-assessment of risk ('contingency'), will be presented to Cabinet following receipt of the Outline Business Case (OBC) decision or, if this is not received in the next three months, in the next report to Cabinet.

7.8

Question from Cllr Alison Birmingham

The administration insisted they needed to spend £2m on consultants to find £17m in saving from duplication and additional layers of management. As Cabinet Member for Strategy and Governance, can the Leader confirm how you will find the additional £10m now you have dispensed with their services?

Response from the Cabinet Member for Strategy and Governance

Organisations use consultants for a number of reasons - sometimes to enhance expertise, sometimes to provide capacity that isn't available and sometimes for their third party perspective. It was a combination of those reasons why we used consultants in this case. As we plan for future efficiencies we are in a different position - as a result of last year's activity we have improved our own internal capability and identified opportunities that we would work through in subsequent years alongside the Budget Challenge process.

Supplementary Question from Cllr Alison Birmingham

Does the Leader agree that future procurement of consultants on contracts that cost more than £50k should in future be subject to specific decisions by Cabinet or decisions made under delegated powers by Cabinet members or senior officers and published so they can be publicly scrutinised?

Response from the Cabinet Member for Strategy and Governance

	<p>The Council rarely makes use of management consultants – most consultancy is technical in nature. Decisions to use consultants are already taken either by Cabinet or individual Cabinet Members [where they are key decisions] or by senior officers under delegated powers. The Council publishes contract awards for consultancy as for other forms of contract on the Contracts Finder website, as required by law.</p>
7.9	<p>Question from Cllr Mike Sands</p> <p>Complaints about the condition of roads, verges, roundabouts and street trees continues in Norwich since the county council unilaterally ended the long-term successful Highways Agency Agreement in 2020 with Norwich City Council. Will the Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport set out exactly what responsibilities the county now has that were once carried out by Norwich City Council under that agreement and the changes in the budget and service standards that have been made compared to those applied before the change?</p> <p>Response from the Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport</p> <p>One of the main drivers for terminating the historic agency agreement was to bring consistency of approach to the county. The following work types are carried out by the Council:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Bridge Maintenance,- Traffic signals maintenance and repair- Main road Streetlights- Highway Maintenance – including routine works, pothole repairs, surface dressing and resurfacing schemes- Highway Improvements- Streetworks / Permitting- Winter service delivery <p>In terms of the budget changes, the Council always used to set the city budget for delegated activities and funded the works. These budgets have changed marginally since 2020, in line with the rest of the county maintenance budgets. The city agency fee that the Council used to pay was a significant saving which have been delivered. In terms of the standards, these are now consistent with the rest of the county in order to provide consistency in approach to highway maintenance.</p>
7.10	<p>Question from Cllr Julie Brociek-Coulton</p> <p>Social supermarkets serve only a small proportion of those communities in need and food banks are struggling with demands they can't meet. Summer holiday provision is not accessible to all families that might benefit and families include affordability barriers including transport to the provision. The rate of food inflation has dropped marginally but cheaper ranges price increases are out stripping average increases. In short, a lot of families are going to be struggling this summer and the agencies that try to help them are struggling to meet demand. What more will the administration do to help?</p> <p>Response from the Cabinet Member for Finance</p>

	<p>We are playing our part to provide support to those people most in need. Last year (2022/23) we supported over 83,000 households, and our support continues this year, funded by the Household Support Scheme. In the last year alone we have provided food vouchers to around 30,000 school children throughout the year, including during the summer and Christmas period. Working with the VCSE sector, 17 new food hubs have been opened, supporting 18,000 people. We have directly supported over 19,000 families struggling with unexpected and day-to-day costs through our Norfolk Assistance Scheme and issued over 15,000 grab and go bags containing essential supplies through our 47 libraries. All of this support is available throughout the year, including the summer period.</p>
7.11	<p>Question from Cllr Chrissie Rumsby Published plans and a report agreed by the Communities Committee offered an exciting vision for the future of Wensum Lodge as an economic drive for the county based around a cultural and community hub. Since then, the case has been strengthened by the emergence of the East Norwich regeneration scheme.</p> <p>The report to Cabinet fails to mention the potential of Wensum Lodge to celebrate our history in a way that contributes to our success in the future. Will the Leader pull the report to give us the chance to discuss opportunities for the site and reflect on the wisdom of disposing of such an historic asset?</p> <p>Response from the Cabinet Member for Community and Partnerships The previous proposal for a creative hub did not progress due to increasing costs and changing habits of adult learners. The initial design estimates undertaken by external consultants had a cost of £20 million, which will have increased significantly due to inflation, particularly of building materials. Also, with a significant shift towards adult learners accessing courses online or in their local community, the proposed usage for the building became unviable.</p>
7.12	<p>Question from Cllr Maxine Webb Last week I attended the SEND Reform protest outside Parliament, with over 1000 other parents of disabled children.</p> <p>This week, the Children’s Commissioner expressed concerns that “it’s becoming ever harder for children to get the help they deserve”, that “It is essential that we get the right support in place for children with SEND” and that “The SEND system should be set up to help these children achieve their dreams“.</p> <p>Is the Cabinet Member for Children’s Services confident that Norfolk’s Local First Inclusion plan will give Norfolk’s children with SEND the help and support they deserve and enable them to achieve their dreams?</p> <p>Response from the Cabinet Member for Children’s Services We are confident that our Local First Inclusion programme will lead to real change for children and young people who have special educational needs and</p>

disabilities, and for their families, due to it's equal focus on improving local mainstream inclusion alongside the development of more specialist provision. Our confidence is based on the fact that our Local First Inclusion programme is the result of a detailed negotiation with the DfE which led to Secretary of State approval for a joint DfE and NCC investment of £100million over a six year period. In agreeing our local plan it was clear that the DfE recognised it's alignment to the government's SEND & Alternative Improvement Plan. However, in Norfolk we are also ensuring that in addition to the Local First Inclusion programme we continue to develop our Area SEND & AP Strategy, using feedback from young people, families and the professionals who support them, to ensure that we are continually adapting to changing need. We also have the recognition from Ofsted/CQC within last years Area SEND Inspection Re-visit that we have improved services and we are confident that when we are inspected within the new Ofsted/CQC framework that we can demonstrate further improvements in outcomes for children. We will never be complacent and acknowledge the challenges that still exist nationally and locally. We must all continue to have SEND improvements as a priority, however, it is of equal importance that we all celebrate the wonderful support that does exist across our county and I was particularly pleased to hear of the great success, evidenced by the parental feedback received, of the recent SENDfest event held at Easton College and created by all of the partners working to improve SEND day in day out.

7.13

Question from Cllr Brenda Jones

Can the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care confirm the current number of vacancies across the social care system that Norfolk County Council is involved in, e.g. social workers, assistant practioners, practice consultants, occupational therapists and care workers in social care settings.?

Response from the Cabinet Member for Adult Social care

Thank you for your question

We currently have a 3% vacancy rate in the Assistant Practitioner role (10.77FTE.); a 20% Social Worker vacancy rate (41.35 FTE.); a 12% practice consultant vacancy rate (4FTE); a 4% Team manager vacancy rate (2 FTE) and a 15% Occupational Therapist rate (6.87%). Our total vacancy rate for front line roles is 10%. We have seen a significant improvement in our recruitment position over the past 6 months due to our new data led and targeted recruitment approach. The impact of this will continue to be seen in coming months. Of the 41 social worker vacancies, we have successfully recruited to 19 of these vacancies. There is a long lead in time for recruits, particularly for international recruits, which can take up to 6 months to onboard.

In terms of the external care sector, Skills for Care collect and publish vacancy rates through their annual return – to which there is a proportionately high response from Norfolk care providers. We estimate that there are 23,850 social care jobs in the Norfolk care market and based on the Autumn 2022 Skills for Care report there was an 8.7% vacancy rate in 2021/22 and turnover of 33.6%. This is below the national vacancy rate for the same period, which was 10.7%. Regionally the current vacancy rate is 10.9% and nationally 9.7%. The highest

point nationally was a vacancy rate of 11.2% in October 2022. Registered managers and registered nurses continue to be the posts that are the hardest to fill, followed by care workers. There are less vacancies for senior care workers. A survey undertaken in April 2023, showed that recruitment numbers were 62% higher than leavers across respondents, suggesting an improving position.

The Council continues to offer a range of support to promote recruitment and retention in the sector including our Norfolk recruitment campaign. Recently, Norfolk has also led the approved application for £2.4m from the Department of Health and Social Care International Recruitment Fund on behalf of the Eastern Region, to establish a Centre of Excellence to provide support to the care market with safe and successful international recruitment.

7.14

Question from Cllr Paul Neale

The Conservatives proposed in February to cut £46.2m from the 2024/25 budget, which will directly affect demand-led services of Adult and Children's Services at a time when demand is increasing, provision costs are increasing leading to the perfect storm. At this month's Scrutiny Committee it has been announced that more 'adjustments' are needed to the MTFS to cover a further £18.7m gap. The Cabinet Member for Finance has repeatedly told me that he has lobbied his government for better funding and a clear MTFS plan. Does he now accept despite his valiant efforts that his government is not competent to manage our country's finances?

Response from the Cabinet Member for Finance

Thank you for your question. There are however a number of misconceptions within it, which I would like to address.

The MTFS in February did not propose £46.2m of "cuts" for 2024-25. Rather, Full Council in February agreed the 2023-24 Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) which set out the forecast gap in budgets up to 2026-27, including a forecast gap of £46.2m for 2024-25 in the context of the net budget required being forecast to increase to £567.337m. It is the need to protect service delivery which means we are seeking to find service improvements and efficiencies to live within our forecast council tax net budget of £521.121m for 2024-25. It is therefore premature to assume that the entirety of this £46.2m gap will be closed through budget "cuts", as an element may be found (for example) through additional income, or transformation. The budget gap position itself is kept under close review throughout the annual budget setting process, which is now underway.

You are correct to note that budget changes for 2024-25 will impact on Adults and Children's Services, and indeed [Cabinet in June](#) has agreed the target savings to be sought from each area of the Council's budget. It is of course inevitable that the largest departmental budgets will have to contribute to closing the budget gap given their size in relation to the overall budget – but the detail of where and how any specific new savings will be delivered remains to be considered and agreed as part of the 2024-25 Budget process. Clearly a key focus for budget setting remains to maximise efficiency savings and transformation in order to minimise the impact of savings on service delivery and service users. Furthermore, budget savings are only one element of the budget setting process and any savings

therefore should not be viewed in isolation from the budget growth pressures which will be provided for as part of developing a robust, balanced and deliverable Budget position for next year.

I would emphasise that the additional £18.7m gap you mention has been added to our financial planning as part of Cabinet's consideration of the update to the MTFs in June 2023, and relates to the 2027-28 financial year. This future year gap is in line with the gap set out in the long term financial forecast budget position as part of the MTFs considered by Full Council in February 2023. The extension of the MTFs by a year is a normal part of the budget setting process at this stage, and reflects a prudent financial management approach.

Finally, in terms of lobbying, the Council continues to engage with Government around our key financial priorities:

- A long term financial settlement for local government.
- An increase in the quantum of funding available to the sector.
- Delivery of fair funding reform, recognising the costs of rural service delivery.
- A fully-funded solution to the funding challenges facing social care.

Although [Ministers have indicated that they have heard local government's calls for long-term funding](#), I have previously expressed my disappointment at the delays to some of these vital reforms. However, I would also note that as a sector we have successfully lobbied Government for additional funding, for example in the inflationary uplift to Rural Services Delivery Grant achieved for 2023-24, and the substantial additional funding provided for social care pressures over recent years. We have also received indications of the funding settlement basis for 2024-25 in the Government's [Policy Statement](#). This represents a step in the right direction, even if it is not the full multi-year settlement we would hope for.

You can be assured that I will continue to argue the Council's case for additional funding, and a long term settlement at every opportunity.

Second Question from Cllr Paul Neale

The NWL OBC is as far from being agreed as it has ever been and work has been paused for at least three months, while inflation pushes the costs up with every passing day. Will the cabinet member undertake a review of the costs of delivering the NWL and provide up-to-date figures, as it has been two years since the last costs were produced, before any work on the project is restarted?

Response from the Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport

Work on the project has not been paused, but rather officers are recommending that activity on the project be reduced while we await a decision on the Outline Business Case. It also has not been two years since the project budget was reviewed – this is reviewed regularly by the project team. The last time the budget was updated was a year ago, when the revised budget of £251 million was agreed by Cabinet in July 2022. As stated in the current Cabinet report, that budget is unchanged. If it were to change, this would be reported to Cabinet.

7.15	<p>Question from Cllr Jamie Osborn Residents have frequently requested signage or other measures to discourage motorbikes and mopeds speeding over St Miles Bridge in Mancroft, which is a frequently-used pedestrian route, including by children going to school. Despite several years of discussions with the county council, those measures have not materialised. Will the Cabinet Member help me to get these simple measures in place to protect pedestrians from speeding motor vehicles?</p> <p>Response from the Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport This administration has increased the local members highways budget to £11k and it is the responsibility of the local member to prioritise their residents' requests.</p> <p>St Miles Bridge is a footbridge and use by motorised vehicles is illegal. There are already several bollards in place to discourage and make it clear to the public that car and motorcycle use is not permitted. Any additional physical restrictions such as barriers could impact on accessibility, including people using wheelchairs or with sight impairments for example. A legal process has to be followed to implement a formal restriction before any additional signs can be erected, Officers will contact the local member to discuss whether any of their local highway member budget could be allocated to these proposals.</p> <p>Second Question from Cllr Jamie Osborn Last year saw record-breaking wildfires in Norfolk, driven by climate change. Fire scientists are predicting even worse wildfires in the UK this year, and warning that fire services are underprepared. What is the county council's emergency plan ahead of what is now, due to climate change, becoming wildfire season in Norfolk?</p> <p>Response from the Cabinet Member for Communities and Partnerships Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service commissioned a full review of last summer's heat emergency and has driven forward with improvements should we face the same challenges again. We have developed an action plan to track progress and have secured funding to be more resilient responding to wildfires. The improvements in our wildfire response have been significant, NFRS senior leaders are available to discuss our future plans and response activities.</p>
7.16	<p>Question from Cllr Ben Price In 2019, this council unveiled proposals to transform Wensum Lodge into a creative hub. Plans were made for upgraded rooms for adult education, along with rental space for start-up creative and arts organisations to bring in money to help pay the centre's running costs. This proposal would have helped safeguard a historic site in the heart of the cultural quarter for generations to come and is supported by the local community. The public outcry against the proposed rationalisation of the site is unparalleled. Will the leader of the council please reject today's recommendation and instead ask officers to look for new funding streams to deliver the creative hub proposal?</p> <p>Response from the Cabinet Member for Community and Partnerships</p>

	<p>The previous proposal for a creative hub did not progress due to increasing costs and changing habits of adult learners. The initial design estimates undertaken by external consultants had a cost of £20 million, which will have increased significantly due to inflation, particularly of building materials. Also, with a significant shift towards adult learners accessing courses online or in their local community, the proposed usage for the building became unviable.</p> <p>Second question from Cllr Ben Price Thorpe Hamlet residents are pleased to see the new 35 bus route introduced. The service is funded by money secured from the DfT to improve bus services across the county and crucially runs hourly throughout the day. Residents in the Quebec road area would like to see more buses operate on the 32 and 132 bus routes. Will the cabinet member work with me to seek ways to secure funding to improve this service?</p> <p>Response from the Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport All service enhancements using Bus Service Improvement Plan funding need to have a high chance of being commercially sustainable once this short-term funding runs out otherwise the service improvement would have to be withdrawn at the end of the funding period. We are therefore carefully evaluating all requests such as this before agreeing to them, or otherwise. Officers will work with the bus operators and look into your request for the Quebec Road area.</p>
7.17	<p>Question from Cllr Colleen Walker Cllr Plant's comments about parking outside schools made the EDP front page.</p> <p>Will he clarify his attitude towards the settled policy of the council for speed restrictions, parking restriction and school streets, as any lack of clarity could encourage drivers to believe they need not follow rules intended to keep children safe, together with an explanation of why he allowed discussion of this item in a body that has no decision making role in parking outside schools?</p> <p>Response from the Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport We have already have clear guidance in our new Norfolk Speed Management Strategy, recently approved by this Cabinet earlier this year. This Strategy explains the criteria for setting and implementing 20mph speed limits and how these are enforced. The Strategy also covers the policy around schools and we are continuing with the School Streets trial to see how we can improve safety and encourage more walking and cycling on the journey to and from school</p>
7.18	<p>Question from Cllr Steffan Aquarone Families across Norfolk are still facing delays of months if not years for Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) assessments for their children. Other than resourcing to clear the backlog of cases, what alternatives have been considered to increase the chances of young people getting the support they need in education? For example: amending aspects of EHCPs pending assessment where a setting and the parents or guardians agree that additional support is urgently needed?</p> <p>Response from the Cabinet Member for Children's Services</p>

EHCPs are produced based on specific advice and information from a range of professionals including the child's school / educational setting, an Educational Psychologist and medical professionals who are involved with the child. Reports from professionals detailing that advice and information are appended to the EHCP as a formal Section (Section K) of the plan.

A diagnosis does not describe the individual needs of a child nor how they are best individually supported, and so an EHCP is not dependent nor predicated upon medical diagnosis such as ASD. An EHCP can be amended following an Annual Review based on the recommendations of relevant professionals supporting and working with the child, which is considered as part of an Annual Review meeting which is usually led by the child's school or setting. Amendments to an EHCP would need to be based on evidence that the child's needs have changed and different provision is required to meet those needs. Special educational provision within educational settings in Norfolk, including resources, support and funding can all be accessed without reliance upon an EHCP.

Second question from Cllr Steffan Aquarone

For the current proposed new Household Waste Recycling Centre, on an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty in Sheringham, what do Norfolk County Council estimate to be the ongoing annual costs for the site, including specifically the ground rent? And what are the total estimated decommissioning costs for the current site?

Response from the Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste

A Cabinet Report on 31 January 2022 clearly set out details of the lease terms for the proposed replacement Sheringham Recycling Centre, which included clarification that the annual rent of £20,000 (which would be index linked and subject to reviews with an annual cap and collar between 2% and 4%) was subject to acquiring planning permission and an environmental permit for the new site.

That Cabinet report also clarified that if the replacement recycling centre went ahead then the existing site would be sold by open market sale through auction or by tender, meaning that beyond caring for the site any decommissioning costs are expected to only relate to any requirements of the Environment Agency as part of the process to surrender the site permit for the existing site, requirements which due to the nature of operations and the site are not expected to be significant if any.