

Cabinet
Minutes of the Meeting held on 04 March 2024
in the Council Chamber, County Hall, at 10am

Present:

Cllr Kay Mason Billig	Chair. Leader and Cabinet Member for Strategy and Governance
Cllr Andrew Jamieson	Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance
Cllr Margaret Dewsbury	Cabinet Member for Communities and Partnerships
Cllr Fabian Eagle	Cabinet Member for Economic Growth
Cllr Jane James	Cabinet Member for Corporate Services and Innovation
Cllr Graham Plant	Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport
Cllr Alison Thomas	Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care
Cllr Eric Vardy	Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste

Deputy Cabinet Members Present

Cllr Greg Peck	Deputy Cabinet Member for Finance
Cllr Shelagh Gurney	Deputy Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care
Cllr Karen Vincent	Deputy Cabinet Member for Children's Services

Executive Directors Present:

Debbie Bartlett	Interim Executive Director of Adult Social Services
Harvey Bullen	Director of Strategic Finance
Grahame Bygrave	Interim Executive Director of Community and Environmental Services
Paul Cracknell	Executive Director of Transformation and Strategy
Kat Hulatt	Director of Legal Services and Monitoring Officer
Tom McCabe	Chief Executive
Sara Tough	Executive Director of Children's Services`

1 Apologies for Absence

- 1.1 Apologies were received from the Cabinet Member for Public Health and Prevention and the Cabinet Member for Children's Services.

2 Minutes from the meeting held on 29 January 2024

- 2.1 Cabinet agreed the minutes of the meeting held on Monday, 29 January 2024 as an accurate record.

3 Declaration of Interests

- 3.1 The Deputy Cabinet Member for Finance declared a non-pecuniary interest as a Norfolk County Council Director for Norse Group, Repton Properties Ltd and Hethel Engineering Ltd, in relation to agenda item 16, "NCC Companies Business Plans".
- 3.2 The Cabinet Member for Corporate Services and Innovation declared a non-pecuniary interest as a Norfolk County Council director for Repton Properties Ltd

in relation to agenda item 16, “NCC Companies Business Plans”.

4 Matters referred to Cabinet by the Scrutiny Committee, Select Committees or by full Council.

4.1 The Chair informed Cabinet that a recommendation had been referred to Cabinet from the People and Communities Select Committee.

4.2 In January, the Select Committee received a report on Norfolk’s Approach to Vaping and following the general discussion Members agreed to ask Cabinet to put pressure on Government to bring about the proposed legislation designed to prevent children and young people from starting vaping.

4.3 Having considered the recommendation, Cabinet **agreed** to take forward this recommendation and **agreed** to write to the Government accordingly.

5 Update from the Chair/Cabinet Members

5.1 The Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste gave an update to Cabinet:

- Thanks to the work of officers, Norfolk County Council had been successful in receiving £150,000 for flood management in Attleborough using natural flood management.
- Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) had provided funding to allow Norfolk County Council to work with local landowners and communities to reduce flood risk in this area.
- It was important for Norfolk County Council to take flooding as a serious matter and the Council was working hard to support communities that needed help.

5.2 The Chair added that the Council was working with MPs to bring a bill to parliament on this issue and with Henry Cator and the Norfolk Flood Alliance. Flooding affected many areas in Norfolk and the Council would work to move the agenda forward.

6. Public Question Time

6.1 The questions received from members of the public and responses to them are published in appendix A of these minutes.

7 Local Member Questions/Issues

7.1 The questions received from Members and responses to them are published in appendix B of these minutes.

8. Director of Public Health Annual Report for Norfolk 2023: Smoking, tobacco control and vaping

8.1.1 Cabinet received the report setting out the Director of Public Health’s independent annual report for 2023 which focussed on smoking, tobacco control and vaping in Norfolk.

8.1.2 The Interim Executive Director of Adult Social Services introduced the report to Cabinet:

- The focus for this year's report was on smoking which was an important issue for Norfolk.
- The Director of Public Health's report gave a view of what had been achieved so far and what further could be done.

- 8.2 The Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care noted, as an ex-cardio-thoracic nurse, the importance of reducing smoking. She pointed out that vaping was useful for people who already smoked as a less harmful alternative, however, was not risk free for those who did not smoke and noted the risks of illegal and unregulated vapes.
- 8.3 The Cabinet Member for Communities and Partnerships discussed that Trading Standards supported this piece of work by reducing the incidence of illegal vapes and cigarettes in Norfolk.
- 8.4 The Cabinet Member for Corporate Services and Innovation reported that a shop selling illegal tobacco and vapes and selling vapes to young people had been shut down recently.
- 8.5 The Chair felt that the rise in vaping in young people was concerning and was pleased that there was a focus on this.
- 8.6 Cabinet **RESOLVED** to
1. Note the 2023 Annual Report of the Director of Public Health
 2. Agree to publish the report.

8.7 **Evidence and Reasons for Decision**

The Health and Social Care Act 2012 requires Directors of Public Health to prepare an annual report on the health of their local population and for it to be published.

8.5 **Alternative Options**

There were no other options presented as it was a statutory duty of the Director of Public Health to prepare an Annual Public Health Report.

9. Adult Learning Annual Plan

- 9.1.1 Cabinet received the report setting out how the Adult Learning Service's proposed strategic and operational activities contributed to Norfolk's priorities.
- 9.1.2 The Cabinet Member for Communities and Partnerships introduced the report to Cabinet:
- Adult learning was externally funded by the Department for Education and through tuition fee income.
 - During the Covid-19 pandemic, all classes except for silversmithing and pottery were held online. Many courses were still held online following the end of the pandemic.
 - The recent Ofsted inspection assessed the service as Good.
 - In 2022-23 the number of learners had increased by 50% and the service was changing to meet learner needs. Funding had been received to set up construction training centres and a retrofit course was being put on.

- Following Devolution, courses would be able to be planned according to the needs of local people.
- Adult learning annual plan had been reviewed based on evidence and updated to respond to the aspirations of county and local people.
- Key priorities were set out on page 99 of the report.
- This paper was taken to Infrastructure and Development Select Committee. Chair of the Committee Cllr Bensly provided feedback:
 - “Infrastructure and Development Select Committee considered the learning plan at meeting on 23 February and unanimously agreed to endorse the plan.
 - At the meeting, the committee heard from the head of adult learning about the fantastic work of the service to improve skills and change lives. There are many impactful stories which show the difference that this service makes to individuals and the opportunities this has opened up for them.
 - Delivering an activity across the whole county at over 100 locations means we are in the heart of the communities, delivering the support and opportunities they need and want. We go to communities, and they don’t have to come to us; an approach that is very much welcomed by our learners.
 - We are incredibly fortunate to have both dedicated learners and dedicated tutors alongside a strong steering group and Senior Leadership Team.
 - A collective effort by all is receiving the recognition it deserves. The committee heard about the recent Ofsted inspection outcome which gave the service a good rating across the board. We were also delighted to hear that the service recently won a further education provider of the year award at the Education Awards and the Committee were pleased to see the actual award at the meeting.
 - This is a service we can all be proud of. The Cabinet Member for Communities and Partnerships showed the award won by the service.”

- 9.2 The Vice Chair endorsed the comments of Cllr Bensly on the Good outcome on the Ofsted inspection. The provision of adult education services across Norfolk and online was welcome. If the County Deal was confirmed, one responsibility it would include would be funding for adult learning meaning the County could agree courses which met the needs of residents.
- 9.3 The Cabinet Member for Economic Growth noted that this service helped address loneliness as well as supporting the economy.
- 9.4 The Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport noted that the service had a focus for the academic year for targeting adults who were seeking employment or who were economically inactive, as well as helping people return to work by giving them support to access new skills and apprenticeships. They also planned to provide independent living skills for people with learning and physical disabilities.
- 9.5 The Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care noted that Ofsted recognised that people with physical, social and economic hardship were able to access learning. This showed that the Council provided inclusive education.
- 9.6 The Chair was pleased that devolution would bring around £12m per year for

Adult Education and control over learning to suit Norfolk residents.

9.7 Cabinet **RESOLVED**

1. To commend the Adult Learning service for its exceptional performance and contribution to Norfolk priorities.
2. To approve the Adult Learning Annual Plan for 2024/25

9.8 **Evidence and Reasons for Decision**

Please see section 5 of the report.

9.9 **Alternative Options**

Please see section 6 of the report.

10. Climate Policy for Norfolk County Council

10.1.1 Cabinet received the report introducing the Climate Policy reflecting the main elements of the Climate Strategy in a more concise policy format.

10.1.2 The Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste introduced the report to Cabinet:

- February 2024 had been the wettest and warmest on record and the year had been the warmest recorded so far globally, showing the importance of this piece of work.
- The UK had shown global leadership to tackle climate change with a target in law for net zero by 2030. The UK had halved its emissions since 1990.
- Local Authorities had an important role in shaping carbon development in areas in a way which reflected local priorities and Norfolk County Council had set out a Climate Strategy in June 2023.
- Norfolk County Council had been independently ranked second in UK county councils in the 2023 Council Climate Action Scorecards.
- The Climate Policy looked to bring the approach into the policy framework to be owned by the council, using the opportunity to restate the county wide vision to align with the national trajectory to reach net zero by 2050. The trajectory would halve emissions by 2035.
- This policy would need involvement of businesses, residents and Government and showed that Norfolk County Council was open for green infrastructure investment.
- This policy gave recognition to the need for a balanced approach regarding farming and food production which would need to be reflected in the net zero target.
- The Council would lead by example by making its estate net zero by 2030; the estate emissions had been cut by 60% so far since 2016/17 and there was an aim to reach 90% reduction by 2030.
- The Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste believed that the policy consolidated what had been achieved so far.
- The Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste moved the recommendations set out in the report.

10.2 The Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport shared information on funding which had been received for projects which impacted on

the aims of this policy. Funding had been received to introduce 70 zero emission buses in Norwich and to install more electric vehicle charging points by 2025. The Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) and the Active Travel Fund for Walking Wheeling and Cycling aimed to reduce car use. The Low Carbon Innovation Fund was available for local businesses to look at how they could reduce their carbon emissions; this had reduced 170,000 tonnes of carbon compared to the target of 10,000 tonnes.

- 10.3 The Vice Chair endorsed the Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport's comments. The Policy showed that the Council was making changes. This policy did not introduce any new financial implications.
- 10.4 The Chair noted that this policy showed the Council's environmental credentials. At the UK council's climate score cards Norfolk County Council came second in the country, which showed recognition of what was being done.
- 10.5 Cabinet **RESOLVED** to
1. Note the proposed Climate Policy, including the new statement of the council's county-wide net zero commitment.
 2. Endorse the Climate Policy's progression for Full Council's consideration via Scrutiny Committee in accordance with part 11b of Council's Constitution.
 3. Agree that a related amendment to the Environment Policy also be put to Full Council to align its wording on our overarching climate commitments with the Climate Policy.
 4. Endorse bringing an annual report to Select Committee and Cabinet on progress of the Climate Policy.

10.6 **Evidence and Reasons for Decision**

The Climate Policy fulfils a commitment made in May 2023 by Cabinet to reflect the Climate Strategy in the council's policy framework. This ensures it is effectively integrated as a policy governing how the council is run.

10.7 **Alternative Options**

Please see section 5 of the report.

11. Climate Action Plans - Tranche 2

- 11.1.1 Cabinet received the report setting out the second tranche of actions for Cabinet's review and covering the Council's initiatives relating to energy, the green economy, and waste and the circular economy.
- 11.1.2 The Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste introduced the report to Cabinet:
- In June 2023, Norfolk County Council launched its Climate Strategy.
 - The strategy set out how Norfolk County Council would address its own carbon footprint as well as its role in supporting Norfolk's low carbon development and green growth.
 - The strategy received widespread support for its detailed coverage of how the council could help shape Norfolk's response to climate change in line with the local context and priorities. The council's approach to climate

was independently ranked second among county councils in the 2023 Council Climate Action Scorecards.

- Action plans were needed to help translate the vision and priorities of the strategy into practical implementation. They represented a governance tool to support member and public oversight of the strategy's delivery by outlining the initiatives taking place across council services that aligned with the strategy's seven focus areas, set out on page 170 of the agenda.
- The action plans were being developed in three tranches to help maintain momentum. Following endorsement of the first tranche of climate actions by Cabinet in October 2023, this report set out the second tranche of actions for Cabinet's review. They covered Norfolk County Council's initiatives relating to energy, the green economy, and waste and the circular economy.
- The third and final tranche would be brought for Infrastructure and Development Select Committee and Cabinet review later in 2024.
- All three action plans would be brought together and updated as a single list to start an annual reporting cycle to members to ensure oversight and accountability over the Climate Strategy's delivery.
- The Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste moved the recommendations as set out in the report.

11.2 Cabinet **RESOLVED** to approve the second tranche of actions as set out in this report

11.3 **Evidence and Reasons for Decision**

Please see section 4 of the report.

11.4 **Alternative Options**

The council could decide to publish all actions related to the Climate Strategy in one rather than to release the action plans in tranches. This would lead to the same end result for creating a reporting framework for delivery of the strategy. However, this approach would slow down the publication of actions for areas which are ready or soon to be ready for release. They would have to be held back by development of actions around more complex areas, which could impact on the momentum for building up the reporting framework.

12. **Highways Capital Programme 2024/25/26/27 and Transport Asset Management Plan (TAMP)**

12.1.1 Cabinet received the report setting out the Highways Capital Programme for 2024-26 and the Transport Asset Management Plan.

12.1.2 The Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport introduced the report to Cabinet:

- The report summarised a 3-year settlement following the Government's 2023
- autumn statement and the proposed allocations for 2024/25/26/27. Details of the Government's 10-year settlement following the Network North announcement were being waited for.

- This Programme included a range of schemes allowing people to travel more easily and supporting infrastructure.
- Norfolk County Council had been successful in attracting funding into Norfolk through the Bus Service Infrastructure Plan and Active Travel Fund for Walking Wheeling and Cycling and Zero Emission Bus Regional Areas (ZEBRA) and £25m for levelling up schemes in King's Lynn. These were mostly related to sustainable travel improvement.
- The County Deal would give longer term certainty over funding and bring forward more ambitious schemes, and allow better planning, improved delivery and improved efficiency of schemes. Devolution would help deliver on the needs of people and businesses in Norfolk.
- The Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport moved the recommendations as set out in the report.

- 12.2 The Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste drew attention to paragraph 1.2.2 and 1.2.3 of the report: "The plan has a clear focus on reducing carbon, a switch to active travel, public transport, and cleaner fuels, and improving people's connections to services and facilities. It enables the authority to deliver against its current agreed objectives and maximises the ability to secure new investment into much-needed transport infrastructure and services to benefit Norfolk's residents and businesses. The plan has the following aims: 1. Embracing the Future; 2. Delivering a Sustainable Norfolk; 3. Enhancing Connectivity; 4. Enhancing Norfolk's Quality of Life; 5. Increasing Accessibility; 6. Improving Transport Safety; 7. A Well Managed and Maintained Transport Network"
- 12.3 The Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care discussed how well maintained the roads in Norfolk were compared to some other parts of the Country. She also spoke about how the Long Stratton Bypass project was progressing.
- 12.4 The Deputy Cabinet Member for Children's Services welcomed the report, particularly the footway reconstruction scheme for Lowry Cole Road and Tills Road and thanked the Cabinet Member for this.
- 12.5 The Vice Chair pointed out that the Council had won an award for its highways service and thanked the Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport and officers for their work which had brought funding in and showed a positive relationship with Government.
- 12.6 The Chair noted that the programme showed the Council was providing new infrastructure to help people get about Norfolk; future projects included the Norwich Western Link and Long Stratton Bypass, which were vital to economic development. She was disappointed to read about possible risks to such funding should there be a Labour Government.
- 12.7 Cabinet **RESOLVED** to
1. Approve the Highways Capital Programme including the proposed draft allocations and programme for 2024/25 and indicative allocations for 2025/26/27 (as set out in Appendices A, B and C of the report).
 2. Approve the proposals for the £10m Highway Maintenance Fund (as set out in Appendix D of the report).
 3. Approve the proposals for the £4.51m Road Resurfacing Fund 2024/25 (as set out in Appendix E of the report).

4. Approve the proposals for the Road Safety Community Fund (as set out in Appendices F and G of the report).
5. Delegate approval of the minor updates to the Transport Asset Management Plan (TAMP) for 2024/25 to 2028/29 to the Interim Executive Director for Community & Environmental Services.

12.8 Evidence and Reasons for Decision

Please see section 5 of the report.

12.9 Alternative Options

Differing proposals could be put forward to utilise planned invest differently across the highway assets or provide additional investment from our Council. However, given the performance as detailed in section 5 of the report, this was not recommended.

13. Highway Parish Partnership Schemes 2024-25

13.1.1 Cabinet received the report setting out details of the 2024-25 Highway Parish Partnership Programme and schemes.

13.1.2 The Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport introduced the report to Cabinet:

- The Highway Parish Partnership Scheme was established in 2011 and allowed local communities to influence the Council's programme of small highway improvements.
- 97 schemes would be delivered this year including trods, vehicle activated signs and village gateways.
- Town and parish councils were asked to make a 50% contribution with Norfolk County Council making up the rest of the funding. This doubled the impact of the funding provided by the Council.
- Bids were accepted from un-parished divisions, with the division raising the required 50% funding, such as Norwich City Council and Great Yarmouth Borough Council who had previously shown interest in the scheme.
- The Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport thanked the councils who had taken part in the scheme.
- The Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport moved the recommendations as set out in the report

13.2 The Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste welcomed this scheme which was well received by parish councils.

13.3 The Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care noted two schemes in her division which was a right of way in Hempnall and improvements to the footway around the war memorial in Saxlingham Nethergate which was part of a wider piece of work.

13.4 The Chair was pleased that this would continue as it allowed parishes to provide schemes which were important for their communities. A list of the schemes provided was appended to the report.

- 13.5 Cabinet **RESOLVED**
1. To approve the 97 local schemes listed in Appendix B for inclusion in the Parish Partnership Programme for 2024/25.
 2. To approve the 21 vehicle activated sign schemes listed in Appendix C of the report for inclusion in the Parish Partnership Programme for 2024/25, subject to securing funding from the Safety Camera Partnership
- 13.6 **Evidence and Reasons for Decision**
- Please see section 4 of the report.
- 13.7 **Alternative Options**
- Cabinet could decide to reduce the County Council's contribution to the Parish Partnership Programme or could decide to not utilise highways funding to allow all the assessed bids to progress. In which case, a set of additional criteria would need to be developed to enable the current list of proposed schemes for 2024/25 to be re-assessed.
- 14 **Progress on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Plan and Objectives 2023-2026**
- 14.1.1 Cabinet received the report setting out the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Plan and Objectives for 2023-2026
- 14.1.2 The Cabinet Member for Communities and Partnerships introduced the report to Cabinet:
- This report set out the plan for 2023-26 and summarised the progress to deliver the first year of the plan.
 - The Cabinet Member for Communities and Partnerships drew attention to the Plan's second objective: "Provide services, information and environments that can be accessed, understood, and used to the greatest extent possible by all disabled people". The Norfolk County Council website was 96% compliant and the Norfolk County Council directory was 97% compliant.
 - Work of this plan included work to eliminate racism and to include all.
 - The Cabinet Member for Communities and Partnerships moved the recommendations as set out in the report
- 14.2 The Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport welcomed the report and pointed out that from 1 February 2024, free bus travel had been made available for disabled passholders and their companions.
- 14.3 The Chair noted that County Hall had won an award for accessibility. The Deputy Cabinet Member for Finance added that the award was Europe-wide; the building was designed to support people with physical and sensory disabilities.
- 14.4 Cabinet **RESOLVED** to
1. Agree the direction of travel for Years 2 and 3 of the Action Plan (2024 to 2026) set out in Appendix 1 of the report.
 2. Acknowledge the feedback from employees that they are affected by racism at work and the actions being delivered to address this, as set out in section 2 of this report.

3. Note the progress to date set out in Appendix 1 of the report.

14.5 Evidence and Reasons for Decision

The evidence for the proposals is set out in the report to Cabinet on 6 March 2023 published on the Council's website.

14.6 Alternative Options

The Cabinet could consider amendments to the proposed objectives or priorities. Alternatively, it could consider not progressing some priorities. This should be considered against the legal implications summarised below and the operational challenges reported to Cabinet on 6 March 2023.

15. Finance Monitoring Report 2023-24 P10: January 2024

15.1.1 Cabinet received the report giving a summary of the forecast financial position for the 2023-24 Revenue and Capital Budgets, General Balances, and the Council's Reserves at 31 March 2024, together with related financial information.

15.1.2 the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance introduced the report to Cabinet:

- This report gave the foundation for 2024-25 and it was important to ensure there were no unforeseen overspends in the final quarter. At the end of January, the Council was forecasting a balanced budget of £493.7m
- Children's Services experienced operational pressures summed up in paragraph 2.4 of the report onwards. The overspend had not deteriorated since previously reported however the high needs block was being monitored. Paragraph 2.11 of the report discussed the problems caused by a broken model of external Childcare provision.
- Adult Social Services were forecasting a balanced in-year position after using £5.5m in year reserves.
- Community and Environmental Services' financial position remained the same as last reported.
- The recommendations included an increase of £8.3m to the capital programme to fund the Norse Project One Loan which was the balance of the £10m agreed in November.
- The Council was on target to achieve 97% of savings proposed in the current year showing the success of the departmental transformation schemes to deliver savings and maintain quality of services.
- The Capital Programme was being reprofiled to reduce capital spend as shown in table one, appendix 3 of the report. This consisted of funding being pushed to future years to reflect the departments' ability to complete projects rather than aspirations to complete them. The Capital Priorities Board continued to evaluate the timing and affordability of all projects.
- Table 4 of appendix 3 of the report showed Norfolk County Council borrowing which was forecast at £63.2m in the current year. All borrowing was funded through cash reserves and an increase in prudential borrowing was not predicted in 2024.
- Written off debts in excess of £10,000 related to care charges that could not be recovered were included in this report. These related to charges which had previously been provided for and would not impact on the outturn forecast.

- The 2021-22 annual reports had been signed off by the auditors and corroborated that the budget was robust, and finances were in good shape.

15.2 The Chair thanked the Vice Chair and officers who had worked hard to get to this position. This was a prudent council which had worked hard to balance the budget.

15.3 Cabinet **RESOLVED**

1. To note the increase of £8.3m to the capital programme to address capital funding requirements previously approved by full Council as set out in detail in capital Appendix 3, paragraph 1.4 and 4.1 of the report as follows:
 - £8.3m increase in NCC Borrowing to fund the Norse Project One Loan
2. To note the revised current and future 2023-28 capital programme as set out in Appendix 3 of the report including the significant reprofiling undertaken to date.
3. To delegate to the Director of Procurement and the Director of Property to undertake the necessary procurement and tender processes to deliver this revised capital programme in accordance with the delegated authority awarded on 6 March 2023 in the Authority to enact Capital Programme paper
4. To agree the period 10 general fund revenue forecast of a balanced budget, noting also that Executive Directors will take measures to reduce or eliminate potential over-spends where these occur within services;
5. To agree the period 10 forecast of 97% savings delivery in 2023-24, noting also that Executive Directors will continue to take measures to mitigate potential savings shortfalls through alternative savings or underspends;
6. To note the forecast General Balances at 31 March 2024 of £25.410m.
7. To approve the write-off eight debts over £10,000 totalling £122,025.21 due to the exhaustion of estate and legal options where there is no further possibility of recovery, as set out in Appendix 2 paragraph 3.11 of the report;
8. To approve the appointment of directors to Norfolk County Council owned companies and joint ventures as set out in section 2.3 of the report, as required by the Council's Financial Regulations

15.4 **Evidence and Reasons for Decision**

Please see section 4 of the report.

15.5 **Alternative Options**

To deliver a balanced budget, no viable alternative options had been identified to the recommendations in this report. In terms of financing the proposed capital expenditure, no further grant or revenue funding had been identified to fund the expenditure, apart from the funding noted in Appendix 3 of the report.

16. Norfolk County Council Companies Business Plans

16.1.1 Cabinet received the report seeking Cabinet approval for each of the four main County Council companies to operate within their 2024-25 Business Plan as approved by their respective Boards.

16.1.2 The Deputy Cabinet Member for Finance introduced the report:

- The County Council had created several companies to assist in the delivery of the Council's aims and objectives.

- The Business Plans for the four main companies had already been reviewed by the NCC Companies Governance Panel at their meeting in February 2024 and were recommended for Cabinet consideration.
- To support good governance, Cabinet was responsible for reviewing and approving the 2024-25 Business Plans for Hethel Innovation Ltd, Independence Matters C.I.C, Norse Group Limited and Repton Property Developments Limited to ensure they reflected the aspirations of the shareholder.
- The Deputy Cabinet Member for Finance gave an overview of the Business Plan of each company:
 - **Hethel Innovation Ltd:**
 - The objectives were set out by the shareholder and shown on page 325 of the agenda.
 - The company worked at Hethel Innovation Centre, Scottow Enterprise Park and the Broadland Food Innovation Centre.
 - The business plan included targets for job innovation and it was planned to improve occupancy rates at all sites in 2024-25.
 - There was an aim to source projects for the team to deliver and expand the company presence outside of Norfolk.
 - There were plans to gain loans to aid expansion of the Hethel Innovation Centre site.
 - **Independence Matters C.I.C:**
 - This company delivered support in the home and community for people with learning disabilities or dementia.
 - Home Support Matters was a separate company in the group providing home support.
 - 2023 saw Independence Matters celebrate 10 years of trading and Home Support Matters celebrate 5 years of trading.
 - The company had achieved its objective of becoming wholly owned and teckal compliant and was now 100% owned by Norfolk County Council.
 - Independence Matters was prohibited from paying dividends and any surplus generated was reinvested into service provision and the community.
 - Independence Matters faced challenges similar to those seen across the wider care market including profitability, recruitment, retention and inflationary and cost of living pressures.
 - **Norse Group**
 - This was the largest LATCo (Local Authority Trading Company) and had 8750 employees working mostly with Local Authorities in England and Wales.
 - They supplied services across 3 divisions of commercial, care and consulting. They were facing challenges across all areas but particularly in the care market as seen at Independence Matters.
 - They were focussed on improving margins and on the areas which were underperforming.
 - Project One was a significant investment in the business and would provide a new system for finance, HR and payroll to improve back office and operational efficiencies.

- There was a forecast rebate to Norfolk County Council of £2.7m
- **Repton Property Developments Ltd**
 - This company had had ongoing success, with 5 schemes on site and more due.
 - Repton had contended with the fallout from Covid-19 cost inflation, the war in Ukraine and interest rates.
 - Nutrient neutrality had delayed some sites and a conservative approach to development been maintained.
 - The company was established to bring revenue returns to the Council and a dividend of £1m was forecast in the current financial year.
 - The company had gone above the requirements of the policy compliance of affordable housing in some of its sites.

16.2 The Deputy Cabinet Member for Children's Services spoke as Chair of Norfolk County Council Companies Governance Panel. The Panel debated the business plans in February and questioned the Chief Executives from the companies.

16.3 The Vice Chair proposed an amendment to recommendation 3 as follows, with the addition of the underlined text:

- Approve the Norse Group Limited 2024-25 Business Plan in Appendix C of the report “subject to Norse Management regularly reporting to the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and the Deputy Cabinet Member for Finance on the delivery against the approved business plan including detailed reports on individual divisional progress within the Care Consulting and Commercial Division”

16.4 Cabinet **RESOLVED** to

1. Approve the Hethel Innovation Ltd 2024-25 Business Plan in Appendix A of the report.
2. Approve the Independence Matters C.I.C 2024-25 Business Plan in Appendix B of the report.
3. Approve the Norse Group Limited 2024-25 Business Plan in Appendix C of the report subject to Norse Management regularly reporting to the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and the Deputy Cabinet Member for Finance on the delivery against the approved business plan including detailed reports on individual divisional progress within the Care Consulting and Commercial Division
4. Approve the Repton Property Developments Limited 2024-25 Business Plan in Appendix D of the report.
5. Delegate to the Director of Strategic Finance to review and extend the term of the Repton Property Developments Limited loan facility currently in place with the County Council

16.5 **Evidence and Reasons for Decision**

Each company's board has approved a 2024-25 Business Plan and are seeking Cabinet's consent to operate the company in accordance with their Business Plan.

16.6 **Alternative Options**

Norfolk County Council, as shareholder, could set alternative objectives for the company and request a revised Business Plan.

17 Point of Order

- 17.1 Cabinet agreed to take item 18, "Reports of the Cabinet Member and Officer Delegated Decisions made since the last Cabinet meeting", next, and then return to the running order of the agenda.

18. Reports of the Cabinet Member and Officer Delegated Decisions made since the last Cabinet meeting

- 18.1 Cabinet noted the delegated decisions which had been taken since the last meeting, as set out in the agenda.

19. Disposal, acquisition and exploitation of property

- 19.1.1 Cabinet received the report setting out proposals aimed at supporting Norfolk County Council priorities by exploiting properties surplus to operational requirements, pro-actively releasing property assets with latent value where the operational needs can be met from elsewhere, and strategically acquiring property to drive economic growth and wellbeing in the County.
- 19.1.2 Cabinet agreed that they were happy to note the exempt appendix to this report without discussing it and without moving into private session.
- 19.1.3 The Cabinet Member for Corporate Services and Innovation introduced the report to Cabinet:
- This report set out options for disposal and exploitation of sites based on existing policies and strategies and were judged to provide the best return to the Council financially and taking account of community benefits.
 - One of the recommendations was a proposal for a lease for Hethel Innovation to operate and develop Scottow Innovation Park
 - There would be community benefits of the lease provision to the SENDAT trust to deliver vocational training in Horticulture and Grounds maintenance at the Duke of Lancaster School and other Special Educational Needs and Disabilities schools.
 - The Cabinet Member for Corporate Services and Innovation moved the recommendations as set out in the report.
- 19.2 Cabinet **RESOLVED**:
1.
 - a. To delegate authority to the Director of Property, to enter into a lease with Hethel Innovation Ltd to operate and develop Scottow Enterprise Park (1084/013) from 1 April 2024 on the basis set out in this report and in confidential appendix A of the report.
 - b. To approve the grant of a 125-year lease of surplus land and building at the former Fakenham High & Sixth Form site (1029/028A) to SEND Academy Trust (SENDAT) and instruct the Director of Property to oversee the completion of the lease on the agreed terms.
 2.
 - a. To formally declare The Meadow, Cromer (1022/024) surplus to Council requirements and instruct the Director of Property to dispose of the

property. In the event of a disposal receipt exceeding delegated limits the Director of Property in consultation with the Director of Strategic Finance and Cabinet Member for Corporate Services and Innovation is authorised to accept the most advantageous offer.

- b. To formally declare Land at Baldock Drive, King's Lynn (2045/014) surplus to Council requirements and:
 - (i) Instruct the Director of Property to dispose of the property to Broadland Housing, or
 - (ii) In the event of no satisfactory agreement instruct the Director of Property to dispose of the property on the open market.

In the event of a disposal receipt exceeding delegated limits the Director of Property in consultation with the Director of Strategic Finance and Cabinet Member for Corporate Services and Innovation is authorised to accept the most advantageous offer.

- c. To formally declare Norman House, Great Yarmouth (6009/025) surplus to requirements and:
 - (i) Instruct the Director of Property to dispose of the property to an Independent Living housing provider, or
 - (ii) In the event of no satisfactory agreement being reached within 18 months of the date of this Cabinet Meeting, instruct the Director of Property to dispose of the property on the open market.

In the event of a disposal receipt exceeding delegated limits the Director of Property in consultation with the Director of Strategic Finance and Cabinet Member for Corporate Services and Innovation is authorised to accept the most advantageous offer.

- d. To formally declare Additional Land at St Peter's Farm, Marshland St James (2049/108) surplus to Council requirements and instruct the Director of Property to dispose of the property. In the event of a disposal receipt exceeding delegated limits the Director of Property in consultation with the Director of Strategic Finance and Cabinet Member for Corporate Services and Innovation is authorised to accept the most advantageous offer.
- e. To formally declare the Bungalow at Low Farm, Brundall (5013/100) (edged red on the plan) surplus to requirements and instruct the Director of Property to dispose of the property on the open market. In the event of a disposal receipt exceeding delegated limits the Director of Property in consultation with the Director of Strategic Finance and Cabinet Member for Corporate Services and Innovation is authorised to accept the most advantageous offer.

19.4 Evidence and Reasons for Decision

Declaring the sites and land holdings surplus to County Council use means that the Corporate Property Team can consider options for the disposal and exploitation of these sites.

19.5 Alternative Options

Declaring sites and land holdings surplus was a result of the sites no longer being required for service delivery. The alternative would be to retain resulting in incurring holding costs for an asset that was not contributing to service delivery.

20. Exclusion of the Public

20.1 Cabinet resolved **NOT** to exclude the public and noted the exempt appendix.

The meeting ended at 11:22

Chair of Cabinet

Cabinet
4 March 2024
Public & Local Member Questions

	Public Question Time
6.1	Question from Tom Reed
	<p>Considering 3 incidents of electric buses catching fire in London, withdrawal from service of much of the electric fleet, NCC nearly £1B in debt partly due to extreme environmental highways projects and 10s of millions of pounds on electric buses which are not at all environmentally friendly due to the enormous rare resources needed for batteries and extreme toxicity hazard of burning batteries, is it time for full review of electric bus implementation, reduction of 'net zero' projects, especially taking into account that UK could cease to exist and our 'pollutive' output reduction would be quickly replaced by China and India building minimum 2 coal power stations every week?</p>
	<p>Response from the Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste</p> <p>The 70 electric buses in Norwich are funded by the Department for Transport and First Bus, and not by the county council. They are already contributing to improved local air quality, quieter streets and a better passenger experience.</p> <p>Our Fire & Rescue Service is proactively meeting with First Bus to ensure that the arrangements in place to prevent a fire are suitable. The operational teams are also working with them to develop an emergency response plan that works to limit the impact of any incident. All crews are trained in dealing with fires involving lithium-ion batteries, in all situations, on a regular basis. Alongside this, we have site specific information on premises such as the Norwich bus depot that considers firefighting actions for that particular premises. We also have specialist hazmat officers that can advise and support at these incidents, and they are mobilised as part of our pre-determined attendance to these incident types.</p> <p>There is no evidence that electric buses are more prone to fire than diesel vehicles: to put the 3 recent fires in London [two of which involved hybrid diesel-electric buses] into perspective, 242 bus fires were reported to the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency over the four years to 2022 (none resulted in injury or death). The fault in the Alexander Dennis buses appears to be nothing to do with their being electric, more it was a fault in the wiring harness for the air conditioning). 155 of these fires were in vehicles over ten years old, showing that replacement of older buses in Norwich with modern vehicles – whether diesel or electric - is likely to actually reduce fire risk, (along with these buses being from a different manufacturer (Wrightbus)). Similarly, evidence from Norway, which has the highest takeup of electric vehicles in Europe, and studies from Australia, show that electric cars are significantly less prone to fire than their petrol or diesel equivalents.</p> <p>As to Chinese and Indian emissions, Chinese emissions are forecast to peak ahead of target whilst Indian emissions account for only 7% of the world total.</p>

Cabinet
4 March 2024
Public & Local Member Questions

	Member Question Time
7.1	<p>Question from Cllr Brian Watkins</p> <p>The administration has laid out an extensive regime of transformation to this Council's departments in order to increase efficiency whilst saving money. Financially, this Council finds itself on a cliff edge and is relying on these savings being realised in order to achieve long term sustainability. It is anticipated that over the next ten years, it may need to cover budget gaps in excess of £300 million. What other cost-saving or revenue raising measures does the Cabinet member believe will need to be explored if current levels of government funding, inflation and other pressures make current savings plans a pipedream?</p> <p>Response from the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance</p> <p>Thank you for your question. As I have previously commented, transformation of our services and processes has been, and will continue to be, absolutely essential to the successful achievement of our savings plans and the safeguarding of a robust financial position into the future. I do not agree that we are on a cliff edge. The detailed work undertaken through the course of the budget-setting process has meant that Full Council in February was able to set a robust, balanced budget for 2024-25 and we are now absolutely focused on its delivery. Alongside this, I would emphasise that we have a strong track record of delivering budgeted savings and a key part of the 2024-25 Budget process has been to ensure that any new savings are similarly robust and achievable. With that said, there is no room for complacency, and we will of course be reporting regularly to Cabinet on both our 2024-25 overall financial monitoring position, and the progress in making planned savings, as we do every year.</p> <p>Looking to the future, there is no denying that the medium and longer term outlook remains challenging. We face a sizeable budget gap for 2025-26, demand and other cost pressures remain stubbornly high, and there is no certainty about funding levels beyond the 2024-25 financial year. This is why we continue to press the Government fundamental reform of local government funding, as I outlined in detail to Full Council during the budget debate. I am not in a position to prejudge the proposals that are likely to come forward for the 2025-26 budget process, but I can assure you that the planning for this is already underway, and I do expect to see a continued focus on sustainable savings. A robust transformational approach will be central, and will underpin the delivery of those savings by making the necessary efficiencies while improving, where possible, the breadth or scope of our services.</p> <p>Second question from Cllr Brian Watkins</p> <p>Norfolk badly needs significant new investment in order to improve its creaking infrastructure, and that is why the proposed £457 million funding for the next three years will be particularly welcome. However, it is disappointing that there is little or no mention</p>

	<p>of our local railways. How is the Council currently working with Transport East, rail providers, local authorities and other stakeholders to lobby for much-needed improvements to services?</p> <p>Response from the Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport</p> <p>The county council has a long history of working with national, regional and local partners to secure investment into the railways. Over the last few years, officers and I have worked very closely with organisations including Transport East, train operators, government and Network Rail. This work has led to some very significant investment. This includes complete renewal of all the train fleet operated by Greater Anglia, the first time the fleet for a whole franchise has been renewed. In Norfolk this covers the Norwich to London, Cambridge, Sheringham, Great Yarmouth and Lowestoft services. There has been recent government commitment to much-needed improvements at Haughley Junction, near Stowmarket on the Norwich to London line, and Ely area enhancements. These will open scope for additional passenger and goods services benefiting the county.</p> <p>As Cabinet Member, I represent the county council on Transport East and – together with officers – the various task forces that Transport East or other regional bodies lead: East West Rail Mainline Partnership Board and Eastern Section Board; Great Eastern Mainline Partnership; Ely Task Force; and the Rail Leadership Meeting that brings together these strands of work, which is held in Westminster and to which MPs are invited.</p> <p>On a more local level, officers regularly work with partners. We hold regular meetings of the Norfolk Rail Group, bringing together local stakeholders and the rail industry, and officers are currently refreshing the Norfolk Rail Prospectus. This will be clear in setting out the need for investment into the rail network and help support our advocacy activities.</p> <p>There is much positive activity in this area, which is achieving positive results for the benefits for the county's residents, business and visitors. This capital investment into rail is not made by the county council as the council does not run the trains or manage the infrastructure, and that is the reason why this is not reflected in the report, which details only capital investment proposed for delivery by the council in its role as highways authority.</p>
7.2	<p>Question from Cllr Rob Colwell</p> <p>Regardless of Transport East stating it as a regional priority because of traffic delays and accidents, there is no mention of the King's Lynn Pullover roundabout flyover in the Highways Capital Programme during the next three years. Is this an error, or are we to assume that despite promises made back in 2019, that once again a West Norfolk project has been kicked into the long grass by a Norwich scheme, this time in the shape of a money-pit Western Link?</p> <p>Response from the Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport</p> <p>The Pullover A17/A47 scheme is referenced in sections 2.3.2 Norfolk Strategic Infrastructure delivery plan, and 2.3.2.7 Pullover A17/A47 of the Highway Capital Programme Report being presented to Cabinet 4 March 2024.</p>

	<p>Currently, further work is being done on the value for money case for a significant improvement at the junction, as detailed in the report. When this is completed, a decision will be taken on next steps for this project.</p>
	<p>Second question from Cllr Rob Colwell</p> <p>Communities around Norfolk are being devastated by multiple flooding events. Residents state our highway drains are not being cleared in time after significant rainfall and before the next downpour, leading to homes being inundated. Please can you confirm the number of high pressure water jetting vehicles that the county has access to via our contractors? There is fear we only have 6 for the whole county.</p> <p>Response from the Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport</p> <p>The past six months have been exceptionally wet in Norfolk, along with several significant storm events. Currently, this period is the 2nd wettest on record in the region. In February 2024 alone, the county council received over 1,100 drainage related enquiries related to flooding, which is exceptionally high. The council's main contractor has 6 drainage crews operating permanently in Norfolk at the current time and they are currently jetting and cleaning road drains and drainage systems. However, other resources are available and have been utilised during this period to supplement the usual resources, including additional resources and crews from Tarmac and Norse Highways.</p> <p>In addition, given the challenging recent conditions, I would like to personally thank all those involved in delivering this vitally important work, including our crews who have been providing a 24/7 response throughout these recent storm and flood conditions.</p>
7.3	<p>Question from Cllr David Sayers</p> <p>I would like to inquire about the Council's available figures and analysis concerning the percentage of initial requests for Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCP) assessments meeting the 20-week deadline in 2023. My concern stems from a performance decline observed over the past two years, with the percentage at 59.9% in 2021 and 49.2% in 2022. Considering the significance of timely EHCP assessments for the wellbeing of children, I am keen to understand whether this performance trend has persisted or if there has been a recovery during 2023?</p> <p>Response from the Cabinet Member for Children's Services</p> <p>It has come to our attention that the figures referenced, specifically 59.9% and 49.2%, pertain to the national EHCP figures rather than those directly associated with Norfolk. Nonetheless, the downward trend observed in Norfolk is consistent with the national trend and has persisted into 2023, albeit at a diminished rate of reduction.</p> <p>It is important to note that this trend occurs in the context of an unprecedented number of EHCP applications and assessments. Specifically, there has been a 41% increase in the number of requests from 2020 to 2021, and a subsequent 14% increase from 2021 to 2022.</p> <p>Despite the increase in applications, there has been a significant reduction in the number of overdue EHCP applications at key stages of the process, and a continued trend of reduction in the total number overdue. This has contributed to the current position in</p>

	<p>2024, where there is a markedly increased rate of completion of EHCP applications within the designated timescale.</p> <p>The support of Local First Inclusion continues at an accelerated pace, with the objective of addressing the needs of children and young people at the earliest possible stage and in the most effective manner. This initiative is expected to influence the number of EHCP applications received in the future.</p>
	<p>Second question from Cllr David Sayers</p> <p>Is the Council prepared to give immediate attention to the surge in malnutrition in Norfolk following the reported rate of 6.7% last year. A report by the Health Foundation strongly urged local authorities to consider implementing evidence-based interventions for reducing food insecurity, including universal or extended access to free school meals, school holiday provision, and meals on wheels. With the situation rapidly escalating, will the Council treat this recommendation with utmost seriousness and address it without further delay?</p>
	<p>Response from the Leader and Cabinet Member for Strategy and Governance</p> <p>Thank you for raising this important issue, as we know that poor nutrition affects outcomes for individuals across their lifetime.</p> <p>Good nutrition and access to healthy food is an important aspect of the work that Public Health and other Council departments are undertaking with a range of partners, as part of our shared commitment to supporting whole population health. The Public Health Strategic Plan 'Ready to Change Ready to Act' prioritises the importance of health improvement for all ages. The plan promotes taking a healthy lifestyle behaviours approach, identifying consumption of a poor diet as one of the key risk behaviours. Recognising a range of factors that impact on having a healthy diet and that working alongside and with health, social care, District Council and VCSE partners looking at these issues more widely will start to address wider determinants such as food poverty and health literacy in ways that we have not been able to previously.</p> <p>Through the Children and Young People Strategic Alliance, partners have recently discussed children's nutrition, recognising its importance, and are working together to develop a better understanding of how organisations can improve support for healthy eating and good nutrition in children. This includes the work of the Norfolk Healthy Child service as part of a Healthy Child Programme (HCP), commissioned by Public Health, who are supporting families in the early years to enable good nutrition, providing information, support and guidance on healthy eating including in pregnancy, breast feeding and infant feeding. Public Health also provide (for free) vitamins to eligible babies and mothers of newborns through a network of community pharmacies and will soon begin distributing vitamins at all health visitor mandated visits to those that are eligible.</p>
7.4	<p>Question from Cllr Steffan Aquarone</p> <p>At the December Council meeting, I asked a question about footpaths and pavements improvements in Stibbard. You kindly agreed to take a look personally and see what recommendations could be made. I have heard nothing further since then, and would appreciate knowing when you will be arranging a visit?</p>

	<p>Response from the Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport</p> <p>The local Highways Maintenance team have been reviewing this request and have recently identified some possible solutions. I have therefore asked that the team arrange to meet you at the earliest opportunity to discuss these and develop an improvement proposal.</p>
7.5	<p>Question from Cllr Paul Neale</p> <p>It was made clear at the budget-setting Full Council meeting that you would not make a final decision on whether to continue with the level of MIG payments at the current level, or reduce them down to the Government minimum level, until after the consultation was completed. Will you confirm that you will act on the basis of the consultation, and not reduce the MIG unless the consultation shows a strong preference for reducing it?</p> <p>Response from the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care</p> <p>No decision will be made until the consultation has ended and Cabinet has reviewed all the evidence. We will take a report about the findings of this consultation to July Cabinet.</p> <p>My fellow Cabinet Councillors and I will consider the consultation responses we receive very carefully.</p> <p>When making our decision we will consider</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The impact of any proposal on individuals, groups or communities and in particular on people identified as having 'protected characteristics' under the Equality Act 2010. The protected characteristics are: age; disability; gender reassignment; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex; and sexual orientation. As well as this equality impact assessment, councillors will consider the impact of proposals on rural areas • The views of people and stakeholders consulted • The evidence of need and what is proven to work effectively and well
7.6	<p>Question from Cllr Catherine Rowett</p> <p>Could the cabinet update us on the situation regarding the sale of County Farms land for dualling the A47: how is this disposal of prime farmland in the County's own portfolio compatible with Cabinet's suggestion that retaining prime farmland for agricultural use is important for food security in Norfolk? How does it fit with their opposition to adding land at Fornsett to the County Farms portfolio, which would have the potential to deliver better access to rail services for the people of Norfolk at a cost of a smaller portion of land than is needed for roads?</p> <p>Response from the Cabinet Member for Corporate Services and Innovation</p> <p>The dualling of the A47 is a project that has been planned for several years and is fully funded by National Highways and central government. It is a nationally significant infrastructure project based on a known need and evidence.</p> <p>The council is fully supportive of the A47 improvements which is vital for the Norfolk economy and is a longstanding infrastructure priority for the council. It should also be noted that National Highways has the power to compulsory purchase any land required for infrastructure improvements, although in this instance, the council has reached agreement to sell the land.</p> <p>Supplementary question from Cllr Catherine Rowett</p>

	<p>Following concern from wildlife organisations about the end of protections for hedgerows, which will allow farmers to cut hedges during nesting season and undermine the contribution of hedgerows as corridors for wildlife, what does the cabinet plan to do, to protect hedgerows in Norfolk, e.g. by lobbying government, by instituting county schemes to enforce good practice etc? Are there plans to protect hedges on housing developments as well as farms?</p>
	<p>Response from the Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste</p> <p><u>Farm support rules: cross compliance</u></p> <p>There are two practices that can be particularly harmful to hedgerows: Spreading agricultural chemicals right up to the foot of the hedge, and heavy or badly timed cutting which leads to physical damage and reduces the benefits to wildlife.</p> <p>Neither of these practices are explicitly prohibited by law. However, until the end of 2023 they were restricted under the so-called 'cross compliance' rules of government farm funding schemes, including the Basic Payment Scheme and Countryside Stewardship schemes. The rules specified standards that farmers had to meet in order to receive payments on environmental protection and the agricultural condition of land for example. For hedgerows, the cross-compliance requirements were that land managers had to keep a green cover on land within 2 metres of a hedge and were banned from cultivating or applying fertilisers or pesticides to land within 2 metres of the centre of a hedge. Hedges were not permitted to be cut or trimmed between 1 March and 31 August, with the aim of protecting nesting birds.</p> <p>The Government is changing the way in which it supports farmers now that the UK is no longer a member of the EU and has left the EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). Cross-compliance rules ceased to apply to farm payments from 1 January 2024.</p> <p>All other protections remain in place for hedgerows and breeding birds, https://www.gov.uk/guidance/countryside-hedgerows-regulation-and-management#full-publication-update-history</p>
7.7	<p>Question from Cllr Lucy Shires</p> <p>Prevention is better than cure and this is especially true when it comes to our residents' dental health. However, access to dental care in this county is becoming more and more difficult with many residents not visiting a dentist for years. This lack of access makes prevention even more important. It is concerning that figures show only a small increase per head of population for Norfolk County Council's public health grant. How does the Cabinet member plan to deliver an effective public health and prevention programme with such scant resources and why is Norfolk receiving such an unfair deal?</p> <p>Response from the Leader and Cabinet Member for Strategy and Governance</p> <p>Thank you for your question. The Public Health Grant allocation is determined by the Secretary of State and was published in February. The grant supports actions in preventing ill health, promoting healthier lives and addressing health disparities. For Norfolk the 2024-25 allocation is 2.2% higher than in 2023-24 at £44,613,712, which equates to £47.30 per head of population. In England, the highest public health grant</p>

	<p>allocation per head is £149.60 and the lowest is £33.60. The use of the grant is based on local needs and according to the requirements set out in the grant conditions.</p> <p>We will continue to use the Public Health Grant to provide a range of vital preventative services that help to support health and wellbeing. An important example is the <i>Norfolk Healthy Child Programme</i>; a public health commissioned service through which health professionals deliver a comprehensive suite of preventative services to children, young people and their families. We are working closely with our partners through the Norfolk health and well-being board, as part of the Integrated Care System and the Integrated Care Partnership in developing and supporting prevention approaches which are known to be effective in promoting good oral health and preventing dental decay across the population.</p>
7.8	<p>Question from Cllr Sharon Blundell</p> <p>Recent research has found that the Household Support Fund provided 62% of all welfare assistance last year. Many of Norfolk's residents would have been dismayed to not hear any mention of this important fund in the Chancellor's Autumn Statement. Can the Leader reassure our vulnerable residents that this Council will use every avenue available to push this Government to continue the funding beyond the end of March, and if necessary to publicly condemn its termination which would undoubtedly plunge many families into poverty?</p> <p>Response from the Leader and Cabinet Member for Strategy and Governance</p> <p>We were disappointed that Government did not take the opportunity in the Autumn budget to extend the Household Support Fund. The Fund has enabled support for many Norfolk families who are struggling with day to day costs of living.</p> <p>We have been working hard to make our case to Government for funding to continue, but unfortunately we have no alternative but to plan on the basis that the funding will not be continued.</p> <p>I have written to Mims Davies MP, the Minister for Social Mobility, Youth and Progression twice to set out in detail the significant benefits that the Household Support Fund has enabled for Norfolk Communities, the implications that its removal would have, and to be clear that the Council is not in a position to be able to replace this funding, or to otherwise maintain the provision in the absence of Government support. I have offered to provide the Minister with any information that would help to secure the continuation of the fund in the future and offered to host a Ministerial visit to Norfolk to enable Ministers to see for themselves the difference that is being made. I have not received any response to either of my letters.</p> <p>Separately, the Council has engaged with representative sector bodies including the LGA and CCN to lobby the Government for the continuation of the Fund. Furthermore, our response to the Provisional Settlement consultation called for Government to continue the Household Support Fund into 2024-25.</p> <p>I have written to MP and officers have attended Ministerial roundtable meetings and shared detailed information with Government about the activities being carried out that the Fund enables, and who is receiving this support. We have also made a number of</p>

	<p>offers to share further information with Government about what happens in Norfolk, or to help Government to make the case for the fund to continue.</p> <p>A number of Voluntary and Community Sector Organisations are carrying out activities that are funded by the Household Support Fund. We have written to all of these organisations to be clear that we are planning on the basis that the Fund will end in March, and a number of these organisations have subsequently written themselves to Government directly about the impact that ceasing the fund will have on their organisations and the people that they are supporting.</p> <p>Whilst the scheme is due to end in March, and we have no option other than to plan on that basis, Government has also said that they have not made any final decisions at this stage. The Government's Spring budget is later this week (6 March) which means there is a further opportunity to either extend the scheme or to allocate funding to other types of support. We will closely watch the budget announcements.</p> <p>In the meantime, we will continue to prioritise hardship support to individuals in Norfolk and work with our strategic partners to deliver our universal offer to residents beyond the Household Support fund, including via the Client Hardship Service.</p>
7.9	<p>Question from Cllr Terry Jermy</p> <p>I note there are four consultation sessions about the proposed changes to the Minimum Income Guarantee taking place in Dereham, but not a single session in Thetford - the fourth largest settlement in Norfolk. I'd be grateful if the appropriate Cabinet Member could confirm the public transport options for people from Thetford to get to Dereham, and the estimated journey time.</p> <p>Response from the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care</p> <p>Thank you for your question. There are several ways people can take part in the consultation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Complete the questionnaire online at https://norfolk.citizenspace.com/ - Online at www.norfolk.gov.uk/savingsproposals - By email at haveyoursay@norfolk.gov.uk - By post, writing to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Minimum Income Guarantee Consultation 2024/25 Freepost Plus RTCL-XSTT-JZSK Norfolk County Council, Ground floor - south wing County Hall, Martineau Lane Norwich, NR1 2DH. <p>As well as having written to all those who may be affected by these proposals anyone can also access support regarding the proposals, or to participate in the consultation, in the following ways: Email the dedicated team directly at charging.policy@norfolk.gov.uk or call the dedicated telephone helpline 01603 306864 which is open 8.30am to 5pm Monday to Friday.</p> <p>I have asked officers to look at putting on an extra session in Thetford Library as we are keen to respond and help as many people as we can.</p>

	<p>Second question from Cllr Terry Jermy</p> <p>A Steering Group exists with a Norfolk County Council representative on it, discussing proposed regeneration plans for the Abbey Estate in Thetford. Despite this falling within the Thetford West Division, I have not been consulted or involved as the Local Member. I'd be grateful if I could be provided with copies of all the minutes from meetings of that group?</p> <p>Response from the Cabinet Member for Corporate Services and Innovation</p> <p>The Abbey working group is an informal working group between Flagship Housing, Breckland DC and the County Council, and it is usual for such groups minutes to not be available. However, any actions affecting the County Council would be subject to formal decision making, such as the recent Memorandum of Understanding which was approved via a Cabinet report.</p>
7.10	<p>Question from Cllr Matt Reilly</p> <p>On Thursday 20th October 2022 Duncan Baker, Member of Parliament for North Norfolk, launched a programme called the North Norfolk 100 Apprenticeship Challenge. Norfolk County Council has publicly supported the programme as sponsoring partners and one of our staff sits on the Steering Committee. However recent press reports indicate that the initiative has now collapsed.</p> <p>Can the Cabinet Member for Economic Growth confirm that only 9 of the 100 promised new opportunities have been created and that the Steering Group has not met since 16 June 2023?</p> <p>Response from the Cabinet Member for Economic Growth</p> <p>The North Norfolk 100 Apprenticeship Challenge initiative, led by DWP, brings together a collection of partners who all work in the existing apprenticeship landscape in Norfolk. NCC supports a range of collaborative initiatives and working groups to help increase awareness and uptake of apprenticeships in the county. There has been no financial commitment required by NCC as partner – the investment of support includes expertise from the Apprenticeship Strategy Manager in the steering group; staffing resource from colleagues in Apprenticeships Norfolk and Pathways to Work teams is already in place to support our strategic aims to support apprenticeships in Norfolk (for more details, please see our recently updated NCC Apprenticeship Strategy 2023-2025).</p> <p>There has been no formal decision to discontinue the initiative – and whilst I can confirm that the steering group has not met since June 2023, all members continue to work hard to provide information, advice and guidance to a range of individuals and businesses in North Norfolk, as well as in other districts across Norfolk too.</p> <p>The ability to ‘count’ new apprenticeship starts specifically through the heightened awareness raised by the NN100 initiative is logistically complex. Steering group partners recognise their responsibilities within GDPR, and as such, collecting and sharing personal data between a number of organisations is not a straightforward task. Partners recognised the challenge in formally tracking the 100 starts, however all agreed this should not detract from our opportunity to continue to work together to support more people/businesses into considering apprenticeships.</p>

	<p>The figure of 9 new starts, is the number which had DWP confirmed they had supported as a result of some events delivered by local job centres – however this figure does not include work from other partners. Partners work across the whole county and support different stages of the process; for example NCC delivers the ‘Apprenticeships Norfolk’ service – which can support individuals or businesses with information and guidance – and also financial support through levy transfers. In the last 12 months, the Levy Support Scheme we offer has supported 14 businesses to access over £165k of levy funding to help support 21 apprenticeship starts in North Norfolk. 80% of these levy transfers have helped small businesses with less than 50 employees. However – of course, these apprenticeship starts are also supported by local (or national) training provider partners too.</p>
	<p>Supplementary question from Cllr Matt Reilly</p> <p>Given the above, does the Cabinet Member for Economic Growth believe it appropriate for Norfolk County Council to remain as an identified sponsor of the Challenge and serve on the Steering Group?</p>
	<p>Response from the Cabinet Member for Economic Growth</p> <p>Yes it is, and we will always work with people or groups who want to promote apprenticeships and we make no apologies for working with Duncan Baker and any other organisations who have the same ambitions for apprenticeships as Norfolk County Council.</p> <p>Our NCC Apprenticeship Strategy 2023-2025 articulates how Norfolk County Council (Apprenticeships Norfolk and Pathways to Work) are committed to providing externally facing services which are free and impartial – in order to increase the awareness of, and uptake of apprenticeships in the county.</p> <p>We do this in a number of ways, including collaboration in a number of different initiatives and working groups. We particularly wish to drive up numbers where data indicates there are cold spots in Norfolk, this includes North Norfolk and other districts too.</p>
7.11	<p>Question from Cllr Chrissie Rumsby</p> <p>Can the Leader confirm which members of the Cabinet accompanied her to Westminster on 31st January 2024, which MPs, other than those representing constituencies in Norfolk, did the delegation present the case for improvements relating to flooding to, and how many representatives from the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs were present?</p>
	<p>Response from the Leader and Cabinet Member for Strategy and Governance</p> <p>Thank you for the question. The meeting was attended by myself the Deputy Leader, Cllr Andrew Jamieson and Cllr Jane James. Six MPs attended; Brandon Lewis, Duncan Baker, Jerome Mayhew, James Wild, George Freeman and Elizabeth Truss. No representation from Defra could attend on this occasion but Norfolk MPs will be taking up our asks with the relevant departments and Ministers.</p>
7.12	<p>Question from Cllr Colleen Walker</p> <p>It took over four months for the Leader to deliver the letter Council unanimously agreed should be sent to the Secretary of State calling for action on coastal erosion. It is now over a month since the letter was delivered. Has she had a response and if not, what has she done to chase it given the urgency and abandonment coastal communities are experiencing?</p>

	<p>Response from the Leader and Cabinet Member for Strategy and Governance</p> <p>To date we have not had a response from the Secretary of State, but as Cllr Walker will be aware responses from Ministers' offices can take some time. I'm sure the Secretary of state will respond in due course and we will continue to liaise with the support of MP offices should we need to follow up.</p> <p>I will share the response with Members when it is received so Cllr Walker need not ask the same question at every single Cabinet Meeting.</p>
7.13	<p>Question from Cllr Julie Brociek-Coulton</p> <p>The recent widespread flooding highlights the inability of the County Council as the lead local flood authority to invest and enforce in flood prevention and ensuring others meet their responsibilities. Will the Leader urgently seek to get the powers and ability to raise resources included in Norfolk's County Deal so the Council can fulfil its responsibility to keep the people of Norfolk and their homes and businesses protected from future flooding?</p> <p>Response from the Leader and Cabinet Member for Strategy and Governance</p> <p>We are all acutely aware of the great difficulties our County faces with flooding and the impact this has on households, communities, and businesses. We are also aware of the problems our local system faces because due the complexity of the regulatory and enforcement framework with responsibilities around flooding divided across numerous organisations and agencies.</p> <p>We welcome Cllr Brociek-Coulton's support for the county deal and she will be pleased to hear that on 31 January we met with Norfolk MPs in Westminster to identify the appropriate ways to tackle the bureaucracy and regulation which is holding us back, and we are making good progress. We will continue to work with local leaders and agencies, convening a summit in Spring of this year to galvanise action and cooperation around flooding. We will continue to engage with our MPs and other regional bodies, as well as decision-makers to press for reform and pragmatism on this important issue.</p>
7.14	<p>Question from Cllr Brenda Jones</p> <p>The Government Household Support Fund finishes at the end of March unless the Government extends the funding. Will the Cabinet Member for Finance advise what representations have been made by him or other Cabinet Members to the Government by publishing his exchanges and the amount by which losing this hardship funding will reduce the Council's ability to support those in need?</p> <p>Response from the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance</p> <p>We were disappointed that Government did not take the opportunity in the Autumn budget to extend the Household Support Fund. The Fund has enabled support for many Norfolk families who are struggling with day to day costs of living.</p> <p>We have been working hard to make our case to Government for funding to continue, but unfortunately we have no alternative but to plan on the basis that the funding will not be continued. In 2023/24, the total amount of funding we received was £13.29m.</p>

	<p>I have written to Mims Davies MP, the Minister for Social Mobility, Youth and Progression twice to set out in detail the significant benefits that the Household Support Fund has enabled for Norfolk Communities, the implications that its removal would have, and to be clear that the Council is not in a position to be able to replace this funding, or to otherwise maintain the provision in the absence of Government support. I have offered to provide the Minister with any information that would help to secure the continuation of the fund in the future and offered to host a Ministerial visit to Norfolk to enable Ministers to see for themselves the difference that is being made. I have not received any response to either of my letters.</p> <p>Separately, the Council has engaged with representative sector bodies including the LGA and CCN to lobby the Government for the continuation of the Fund. Furthermore, our response to the Provisional Settlement consultation called for Government to continue the Household Support Fund into 2024-25.</p> <p>I have written to MPs and officers have attended Ministerial roundtable meetings and shared detailed information with Government about the activities being carried out that the Fund enables, and who is receiving this support. We have also made a number of offers to share further information with Government about what happens in Norfolk, or to help Government to make the case for the fund to continue.</p> <p>A number of Voluntary and Community Sector Organisations are carrying out activities that are funded by the Household Support Fund. We have written to all of these organisations to be clear that we are planning on the basis that the Fund will end in March, and a number of these organisations have subsequently written themselves to Government directly about the impact that ceasing the fund will have on their organisations and the people that they are supporting.</p> <p>Whilst the scheme is due to end in March, and we have no option other than to plan on that basis, Government has also said that they have not made any final decisions at this stage. The Government's Spring budget is later this week (6 March) which means there is a further opportunity to either extend the scheme or to allocate funding to other types of support. We will closely watch the budget announcements.</p> <p>In the meantime, we will continue to prioritise hardship support to individuals in Norfolk and work with our strategic partners to deliver our universal offer to residents beyond the Household Support fund, including via the Client Hardship Service.</p>
7.15	<p>Question from Cllr Mike Smith-Clare</p> <p>The Household Support Fund has been used to provide £240 a year in cost of living vouchers to feed children in Norfolk, including during school holidays. The Household Support Funding ends at the end of March 2024, as will this vital voucher scheme. What plans has the Cabinet Member for Children's Services made to ensure children who currently benefit from these vouchers will not go hungry, especially over the long Summer Holiday?</p> <p>Response from the Cabinet Member for Children's Services</p> <p>Whilst the loss of the Household Support Fund will be significant, there are a number of other local initiatives that will be continuing and supporting families with children.</p>

	<p>Children's Services community and partnership teams are engaging with families and enabling them to be aware of and where needed, connecting them with the network of community supermarkets/ stores which are supporting around 22,000 people from over 8,500 households across the county as part of the Nourishing Norfolk network (Nourishing Norfolk Network Norfolk Community Foundation (norfolkfoundation.com), and which is being supported by the Council.</p> <p>The teams' early help community workers maintain strong links with local food banks and community groups to ensure that wider support that families might need is available, including for example, access to local groups or links with libraries to reduce social isolation and loneliness. Libraries are free, welcoming spaces in the community and residents can attend free events and activities, including a broad programme through school holidays designed for families. Norfolk Libraries provide regular 'Just a cuppa sessions' to meet and chat with other people whilst enjoying a hot drink, offer free bags of sanitary products and our Library staff sign post and connect visitors to trusted information about other support available.</p> <p>Norfolk's Holiday Activities and Food programme (HAF), led by Children's Services, provides a broad programme of free HAF activities across the county for 5-16 year olds eligible for means-tested free school meals during the Easter, summer and Christmas holidays. Alongside providing opportunities for children to have fun and meet new friends, the programme is supporting those taking part to receive a healthy and nutritious meal as part of each session. This is helping children to maintain a healthy level of physical activity, be happy, and to develop a greater understanding of food, nutrition and other health-related issues. Last summer, the HAF programme worked with 109 activity providers to offer 46,472 free sessions over the 6-week holiday period, and we anticipate a similar level of provision this summer. We are awaiting clarification on Central Government's intentions to fund the Holiday Activities and Food programme beyond 2024.</p> <p>Outside of school holiday periods, we will continue to promote take up of free school meals and, with almost 100% take up, there are currently around 30,000 children who access means tested free school meals. This is in addition to all children in Year Reception, 1 and 2 who automatically receive free school meals.</p> <p>Norfolk County Council's Client Hardship Service can also support families to provide financial assistance for food, energy, water and other essential household items.</p>
7.16	<p>Question from Cllr Alison Birmingham</p> <p>Heartsease roundabout scheme includes the building of a very long wall on the corner of St Williams Way and Plumstead Road. How much did it cost to build that wall?</p> <p>Response from the Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport</p> <p>The wall in question is a new retaining wall built to reflect a change in highway boundary following the acquisition of some private land from the owner of 1A St Williams Way as part of the delivery of this scheme. This has enabled additional space to be created for those walking and cycling on this part of the junction, which was a key outcome that came out of the consultation and was a requirement set out by Active Travel England.</p>

	<p>This wall is needed to demarcate the revised boundary of this property and is therefore an essential element of the scheme. The wall is extensive in length (65m) and it was agreed with the landowner as part of the purchase of the land that it would be constructed to a height of 6ft to provide privacy, considering the previous boundary consisted of tall, dense foliage. The specification of the wall meets all required safety and structural standards given the fact that this will be located adjacent to a busy footway and cycleway. The costs of constructing the wall form part of the wider construction works of the project and cost in the region of £100,000, which is part of the overall funding from DfT.</p>
7.17	<p>Question from Cllr Mike Sands</p> <p>What role does the County Council have in the regeneration of key sites in Norwich and how can support for the city be improved?</p> <p>Response from Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport</p> <p>The County Council is not the determining planning authority, this responsibility lies with the City Council. However, we discharge several critical consultee roles advising on matters including flood risk, environment, infrastructure and highways and transport considerations. The County Council is represented on the East Norwich Strategic Regeneration Area Delivery Board, Greater Norwich Growth Board and Greater Norwich Development Partnership and recognises the importance we place in supporting proposals to bring forward a new quarter for Norwich on the most important brownfield regeneration site in the eastern region. The County Council is also a member of the Norwich Town Deals Board which has secured funding to support regeneration of a number of sites in the city. The council also maintains active dialogue with the City Council to support its aspirations around regeneration and the delivery of much needed housing.</p>
7.18	<p>Question from Cllr Jamie Osborn</p> <p>At a recent Scrutiny meeting, questions about the outcomes of pre-application planning advice discussions with Natural England regarding the viability of the Norwich Western Link were not answered. Please can the Cabinet Member state what assurance he has had from Natural England that the project will secure a bat derogation license?</p> <p>Response from the Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport</p> <p>The NWL would require a bat European Protected Species (EPS) mitigation licence from Natural England for any work that would have an impact on EPS. Pre-planning application discussions have taken place between the project team and Natural England to develop the mitigation strategy set out within the Environmental Statement that will form part of the planning application submission. During this process, two rounds of draft licence application submissions have taken place, the second currently under Natural England review. These submissions have been undertaken to ensure Natural England have an advanced understanding of the content of the licence application, and, to ensure the project team has a full understanding of the thoughts / queries Natural England have on the draft application, prior to development and submission of the formal licence. Continued Natural England engagement will take place as part of the Planning Application submission, as well as the specific engagements in relation to the draft licence application. However, the licence will not be formally submitted to and approved by Natural England until planning consent has been granted, and a number of the planning conditions discharged. Therefore, there is a process which needs to be</p>

followed. While our discussions have been very useful in informing our approach, we would not expect Natural England to pre-judge the outcome of this process, with a complex application such as this.

Supplementary question from Cllr Jamie Osborn

The Dereham Road BSIP scheme fails to improve what is already a dangerous junction for cyclists. This is one of the main routes into the city for cyclists coming from the west of Norwich, as is evidenced by the specific provision of cycle lane along Dereham Road - although the cycle lane is broken up and abruptly ends and then restarts at points. What assessment has been done of the impact of this major junction change on cyclists?

Response from the Cabinet member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport

This section of Dereham Road is not promoted as a cycle route and does not have any designation as a pedalway. For those cycling into the city from the west of Norwich, the green pedalway provides an alternative route using West Pottergate, and there is a Neighbourhood route using Orchard Street and Heigham Street, both of which avoid this busy junction.

The Dereham Road Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) scheme aims to relieve congestion and reduce delays for all users at the busy Dereham Road / Grapes Hill junction by creating more space for buses and general traffic. Existing cycle facilities at the junction and on approaches are being retained.

Unfortunately, there is insufficient space to provide additional cycle infrastructure without significantly reducing the capacity of the junction, which would introduce unacceptable levels of congestion and delay for all users.