

Cabinet
5 July 2021
Local Member Questions

| Agenda item 7 | Local Member Issues/Questions |
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| 7.1 | <p>Question from Cllr Ed Maxfield With the rate of inflation rising above the Bank of England target and predicted to rise further it is widely expected that interest rates will also rise in the near future. What is the financial impact on the Council of a rise of one, three and five percentage points in the rate we are charged, based on current and predicted future levels of borrowing?</p> <p>Response from the Cabinet Member for Finance The majority of the County Council's existing debt is at fixed interest rates and there will be no impact from an increase in interest rates. The Council's Medium term Financial Strategy includes a budget planning assumption of borrowing of £80m for 2021/22, 2022/23 and 2023/24 based on interest rates of 2.5%, 2.7% and 2.8%. As can be seen from the increase in interest rates over the period, the Council is already planning for an increase in interest rates. The Council's most recent borrowing in June has been below 2%. Any changes to interest rates will be reflected in future revisions to the Medium Term Financial Strategy. Using the planned £80m borrowing for 2021/22, a one, three and five percentage points increase would result in additional interest costs of £0.8m, £2.4m and £4m per annum.</p> |
| 7.2 | <p>Question from Cllr Jamie Osborn How can the council ensure the contractor appointed for the Western Link will deliver an objective and trustworthy environmental impact assessment and assessment of carbon impacts when the contractor has a vested interest in not only getting this road built but also in other environmentally-damaging projects such as airport expansion and the Silvertown Tunnel?</p> <p>Response from the Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste The project must successfully pass through the statutory approvals process, which will consider the Environmental Statement, which takes into account the Environmental Impact Assessment and will include carbon assessments. As such, it is in the interests of both the contractor and Council to ensure a robust and accurate assessment.</p> |
| 7.3 | <p>Question from Cllr Alexandra Kemp</p> <p>Can NCC fully review its harmful agreement with Highways England for 300 homes on the A10, before necessary highways improvements at the Hardwick Roundabout, the A47 dualling and A10 bypass which Highways England always said must come first? Post-pandemic urban flight and staycations via the North Norfolk Coast Gateway are worsening chronic congestion.</p> <p>NCC's consultants WSP wrote -: 1. West Norfolk is significantly worse than national for people killed or seriously injured on roads. 2... There was an 80% increase in road accidents around Lynn and West Winch. 3... The Hardwick Roundabout is an accident blackspot. 4... 300 Homes will worsen congestion and accidents.</p> |

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| | <p>Put public safety first.</p> <p>Response from the Cabinet Member for Highways and Infrastructure</p> <p>No “agreement” has been made with Highways England. Whilst we work with stakeholders in the development process to help bring forward allocated growth, any developer needs to demonstrate the impacts of their housing proposal on the road network to the Borough Council, County Council and Highways England. In this case such information has been assessed independently by all three bodies. Anything deemed unsafe would be identified in this process. The results of these assessments have been fed back to the Borough Council who will ultimately decide what level of development can proceed before the West Winch Housing Access Road (WWHAR) is in place.</p> |
| 7.4 | <p>Question from Cllr Mike Smith-Clare</p> <p>Can the Cabinet Member highlight what was done to save Norwich’s Develop training centre?</p> <p>Response from the Cabinet Member for Children’s Services</p> <p>Following the Department for Education’s (DfE) decision to withdraw their contract with Develop EBP, Officers from Norfolk County Council have been working with the DfE, the Education & Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) and other Local Authorities in the Eastern Region to consider the implications and our local and collective response.</p> <p>It is the view of Norfolk County Council that Develop EBPs’ provision for learners has been of good quality and so we have been concerned that the withdrawal of contract could have negative impacts on existing learners being able to complete their programmes and move on to their next planned destinations. Furthermore we have had concerns that the closure of Develop EBP may leave a gap in the provision landscape for future learners, including those with SEND.</p> <p>Following discussions with staff at Develop EBP and with the ESFA we have been assured that existing learners have either already been transferred to other local providers or are approaching the completion of their programmes of study at the end of this academic year and most have plans in place for their next steps. Additional support for learners has been offered by the Local Authority for learners completing their programmes with Develop EBP. Furthermore, we have been assured by the ESFA that learner numbers and the type of education and training provision that has been provided by Develop EBP will transfer to an alternative provider in the Norwich area for September 2021.</p> <p>We have had regular meetings, on an almost weekly basis, with both the other LA’s where Develop operate and the ESFA to explore any possible avenue to avoid the closure. This included a potential merger with another provider to then take on the provision. Unfortunately this proved to not be a viable option. To mitigate the loss of the centre as much as we could we have negotiated with the ESFA for the learner numbers that would have been allocated to Develop for the 21/22 academic year to remain in Norfolk. The ESFA is in the process of agreeing their re-allocation to an alternative Norfolk based provider based upon our recommendation.</p> |

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| 7.5 | <p>Question from Cllr Chrissie Rumsby Does the cabinet member know how many young people have been temporarily excluded from lessons due to uniform or fashion/haircut rule infringements this year?</p> <p>Response from the Cabinet Member for Children's Services If the exclusion was internal (sometimes called isolation) this is not an official exclusion as the pupil continues to be taught at school. We are unlikely to be informed of this unless the school has sought our support. For most fixed term exclusions where young people are sent home for less than 5 days, these are reported to the local authority on a termly basis. Schools are not required to share with us the level of detail that would allow us to understand how many children have been fixed term excluded for uniform or hair cut issues.</p> |
| 7.6 | <p>Question from Cllr Emma Corlett I was pleased the Leader took the opportunity to write quickly to the new Secretary of State for Health and Social Care. Was there a reason he omitted to include the desperate problems with the mental health service and dentistry in Norfolk amongst the urgent issues that need addressing</p> <p>Response from the Leader and Cabinet Member for Strategy and Governance Thank you for your question. The purpose of the letter was to congratulate the Secretary of State on his appointment and highlight outstanding correspondence with his predecessor, such as Adult Social Care Funding, Health and Social Care Integration and the desperate need to replace the Queen Elizabeth Hospital. We hope to have a very productive relationship with Sajid Javid going forward, bearing in mind his background working with Local Government and will continue to flag important issues to him.</p> |
| 7.7 | <p>Question from Cllr Steve Morpew The sale of the airport industrial estate in my division will result in the reduction in income to the county council that can be spent on services of around £400k a year. How will that shortfall be made up and why is the council proposing to sell rather than invest when borrowing rates are low in order to promote income generation, new businesses and new jobs in one of the more deprived areas of Norwich?</p> <p>Response from the Cabinet Member for Commercial Services and Asset Management I would like to thank Cllr Morpew for his question. As he will be aware good asset management is not just about acquisition, but around actively managing portfolios – which includes divesting assets.</p> <p>As Cllr Morpew should be aware, we have been working closely with his colleagues in the administration at Norwich City Council – who will be considering a similar report in the next few days. Options were explored in depth and as the report details the current site will continue to provide a key employment area for this part of Norwich. In reaching this decision we have also considered the level of investment needed for this estate and the potential financial return, as well as</p> |

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| | <p>where else this funding could be deployed.</p> <p>I would be happy to arrange a meeting with him to discuss how we are investing capital receipts into creating new jobs, new educational facilities, and growth into economic opportunities – for example in Great Yarmouth supporting new environmental technology. These are investments that will not only raise the prosperity of the County, but also deliver revenue benefits.</p> |
| 7.8 | <p>Question from Cllr Lucy Shires</p> <p>Over the past 12 months, there has been a steady decrease in the percentage of vulnerable children with a Children in Need Plan. When are we likely to see an improvement in service for these children, and what is the impact on those whose plans are out of date?</p> <p>Response from the Cabinet Member for Children's Services</p> <p>Our numbers of children subject to CiN Plans over a 12 mth period has dropped slightly from 1342 to 1291, so a reduction of 51 children or 3.8%. Rather than representing any decline in quality of service and support to these children, it is a result of a combination of factors including;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Overall drop in referrals to Children's Social Care as a result of the pandemic and lockdown periods B. Improved quality of our social work and decision making meaning more cases being appropriately managed by our Family Support teams (an increase of 129 children), and C. Strengthening of our response with greater capacity in the Community and Partnership Service at an early point supporting partner agencies managing emerging need. <p>Regarding the timeliness of our Child in Need Plans, alongside ensuring they are of consistently high quality, it is very much the focus of our Heads of Service this year and is an agenda item at each locality's monthly performance clinic. We are confident that all our Children In Need have a plan, that reviews of the plan are taking place, and that their social workers are working hard with them to achieve good outcomes. However, recording and updating of those plans needs to improve, and it is the expectation that the number of plans recorded on the case management system reaches 80% by the end of July 2021 and 90% by end of September 2021.</p> |
| 7.9 | <p>Question from Cllr Dan Roper</p> <p>The Council has announced its plans to save around £40 million from Council budgets in 2022/23, and more than £100 million by April 2025. How will it seek to ensure that the most vulnerable people across the county are best protected against the worst effect of these cuts?</p> <p>Response from the Cabinet Member for Finance</p> <p>The County Council has a well established process for developing its budget which provides an opportunity for public consultation on all proposals, including those with an impact on service delivery. The Council has a track record of prioritising budget reductions achieved through efficiencies, whilst protecting front line services as far as possible, which in previous years has included taking</p> |

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| | <p>difficult decisions to raise council tax in order to mitigate the level of budget reductions required. This approach is being maintained in the development of the 2022-23 Budget and there will be further reports to Cabinet during the coming year on the progress towards developing the 2022-23 Budget. All budget proposals taken forward will be subject to a detailed Equality Impact Assessment which will include recommendations for mitigating actions, to ensure that the impacts of any proposals, and options for how these impacts can be minimised, are fully understood when final budget decisions are taken by Full Council in February 2022.</p> |
| 7.10 | <p>Question from Cllr Timothy Adams Will Norfolk do what it can to re-home some of the 3000 Afghan interpreters expected to be come to the UK following the withdrawal of British soldiers, and has any consideration been given by the County Council as to how these efforts might be supported?</p> <p>Response from the Leader and Cabinet Member for Strategy and Governance The Afghan Locally Employed Staff (LES) Relocation Scheme is a joint operation between the MOD, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and Home Office to relocate Afghan nationals and their families who have put their lives at risk to assist the British and US military operations in Afghanistan.</p> <p>To date, 1,362 people have been relocated to the UK. Because of the recent withdrawal of the British and US troops, LES and their family members are now at significant risk due to their perceived allegiance to the West and treachery to the Afghan state and Taliban. The UK government has pledged to receive a further 3,000 individuals by the end of August 2021.</p> <p>In June 2021, Ministers wrote to local authorities to ask them to step forward at pace to support the commitment to LES at risk and their families to provide accommodation and relocation packages. The scheme is funded by the Treasury and administered via the Home Office. Participation is cost-neutral.</p> <p>Norfolk County Council (with the support of district and borough councils) currently delivers a Refugee Resettlement Scheme funded by the Home Office at no cost to the County Council, supporting Syrian refugee families to resettle in the Norwich area. This scheme is nationally recognised by the Home Office and LGA as a model of best practice and there is capacity to support the Afghan Locally Employed Staff (LES) Relocation Scheme.</p> <p>'We have indicated informally that we have offered 5 properties to the Home Office and our offer is currently under consideration for potential matching with LES staff and their families to be relocated to Norfolk. Further properties to be offered to the Home Office by the end of August subject to availability. A formal cabinet decision is in preparation for formalising this position.</p> |
| 7.11 | <p>Question from Cllr Brian Watkins With the end to Covid restrictions now in sight, how is the County Council working with local tourist attractions, other district councils, and the hospitality sector to attract more visitors to Norfolk in the coming months?</p> |

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| | <p>Response from the Cabinet Member for Growing the Economy</p> <p>Following the successful delivery of the major Norfolk Tourism Recovery Project, Norfolk County Council continues to work closely with District partners, Visit East of England, and local Destination Management Organisations (DMOs) to ensure a coordinated approach to the safe reopening of our tourism offer. A Tourism Recovery Best Practice Group meets regularly to ensure a coordinated county approach to tourism, to connect with national tourism bodies including Visit England, and to deliver a range of initiatives to support the sector. Recent work has included developing a Reopening Norfolk Safely toolkit to help tourism businesses open safely, and the recent launch of the new Celebrating Culture 2021 campaign, which highlights the great cultural offers which visitors can safely enjoy across Norfolk and Suffolk. All work continues to be delivered in close cooperation with Public Health to ensure that the tourism sector receives the help it needs, and that our local communities are also fully supported.</p> |
| 7.12 | <p>Question from Cllr Steffan Aquarone</p> <p>In the Queens Speech, we saw some welcome hints that there will be investment in preventative public health measures. However, we did not get any indication about timescales for new funding or legislation for social care. Can we hear what this Administration plans to do to continue to ensure this remains on the Government's agenda?</p> <p>Response from the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care, Public Health and Prevention</p> <p>Thank you for your question. The role of public health, prevention and social care in developing and sustaining healthy communities has never been more important. The pandemic has shown further how crucial our services are in supporting those most at risk in communities and our local Integrated Care System will be the driving force for prioritising prevention.</p> <p>We continue at every opportunity to make the case for investment in social care, including writing to the new Health and Social Care Secretary to urge him to tackle the issue of a lack of long-term, sustainable government funding and reform.</p> |
| | <p>Question from Cllr Ben Price</p> <p>Given the changes to peoples working habits the pandemic has accelerated, and the need for this council to meet government carbon reduction targets, will the County Council support the introduction of a workplace parking levy in helping to discourage employers devoting land to car parking and increase active sustainable transport, by stating this desire in the emerging local transport plan?</p> <p>Response from the Cabinet Member for Cabinet Member Highways and Transport</p> <p>The Local Transport Plan draft strategy contains a policy that states "Action will be taken to improve air quality in urban centres, including investigating vehicular restrictions or charging..." This clearly sets out that measures including workplace parking charges, but also clean air zones, ultra-low emission zones or congestion charging, will be considered to improve air quality, and which will also have significant carbon reduction benefits. Considerable work would be required to understand which, if any, might be appropriate to take forward. Further examination of the appropriateness of such measures is being considered in</p> |

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| | development of the Transport for Norwich strategy. |
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