

**Cabinet**  
**4 March 2024**  
**Public & Local Member Questions**

	<b>Public Question Time</b>
6.1	<b>Question from Tom Reed</b>
	<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><b>Response from the Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste</b></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 &amp; 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>

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	<b>Member Question Time</b>
7.1	<p><b>Question from Cllr Brian Watkins</b></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><b>Response from the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance</b></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><b>Second question from Cllr Brian Watkins</b></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><b>Response from the Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport</b></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><b>Question from Cllr Rob Colwell</b></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><b>Response from the Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport</b></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><b>Second question from Cllr Rob Colwell</b></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><b>Response from the Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport</b></p> <p>The past six months have been exceptionally wet in Norfolk, along with several significant storm events. Currently, this period is the 2<sup>nd</sup> 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><b>Question from Cllr David Sayers</b></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><b>Response from the Cabinet Member for Children's Services</b></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><b>Second question from Cllr David Sayers</b></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><b>Response from the Leader and Cabinet Member for Strategy and Governance</b></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><b>Question from Cllr Steffan Aquarone</b></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><b>Response from the Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport</b></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><b>Question from Cllr Paul Neale</b></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><b>Response from the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care</b></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"> <li>• 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</li> <li>• The views of people and stakeholders consulted</li> <li>• The evidence of need and what is proven to work effectively and well</li> </ul>
7.6	<p><b>Question from Cllr Catherine Rowett</b></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><b>Response from the Cabinet Member for Corporate Services and Innovation</b></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><b>Supplementary question from Cllr Catherine Rowett</b></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><b>Response from the Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste</b></p> <p><b><u>Farm support rules: cross compliance</u></b></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 '<a href="#">cross compliance' rules of government farm funding schemes</a>, 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, <a href="https://www.gov.uk/guidance/countryside-hedgerows-regulation-and-management#full-publication-update-history">https://www.gov.uk/guidance/countryside-hedgerows-regulation-and-management#full-publication-update-history</a></p>
7.7	<p><b>Question from Cllr Lucy Shires</b></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><b>Response from the Leader and Cabinet Member for Strategy and Governance</b></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><b>Question from Cllr Sharon Blundell</b></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><b>Response from the Leader and Cabinet Member for Strategy and Governance</b></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><b>Question from Cllr Terry Jermy</b></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><b>Response from the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care</b></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"> <li>- Complete the questionnaire online at <a href="https://norfolk.citizenspace.com/">https://norfolk.citizenspace.com/</a></li> <li>- Online at <a href="http://www.norfolk.gov.uk/savingsproposals">www.norfolk.gov.uk/savingsproposals</a></li> <li>- By email at <a href="mailto:haveyoursay@norfolk.gov.uk">haveyoursay@norfolk.gov.uk</a></li> <li>- By post, writing to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Minimum Income Guarantee Consultation 2024/25</li> <li>Freepost Plus RTCL-XSTT-JZSK</li> <li>Norfolk County Council, Ground floor - south wing</li> <li>County Hall, Martineau Lane</li> <li>Norwich, NR1 2DH.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <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 <a href="mailto:charging.policy@norfolk.gov.uk">charging.policy@norfolk.gov.uk</a> 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><b>Second question from Cllr Terry Jermy</b></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><b>Response from the Cabinet Member for Corporate Services and Innovation</b></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><b>Question from Cllr Matt Reilly</b></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><b>Response from the Cabinet Member for Economic Growth</b></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><b>Supplementary question from Cllr Matt Reilly</b></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><b>Response from the Cabinet Member for Economic Growth</b></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><b>Question from Cllr Chrissie Rumsby</b></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><b>Response from the Leader and Cabinet Member for Strategy and Governance</b></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><b>Question from Cllr Colleen Walker</b></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><b>Response from the Leader and Cabinet Member for Strategy and Governance</b></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><b>Question from Cllr Julie Brociek-Coulton</b></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><b>Response from the Leader and Cabinet Member for Strategy and Governance</b></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><b>Question from Cllr Brenda Jones</b></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><b>Response from the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance</b></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><b>Question from Cllr Mike Smith-Clare</b></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><b>Response from the Cabinet Member for Children's Services</b></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 (<a href="http://norfolkfoundation.com">norfolkfoundation.com</a>), 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><b>Question from Cllr Alison Birmingham</b></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><b>Response from the Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport</b></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><b>Question from Cllr Mike Sands</b></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><b>Response from Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport</b></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><b>Question from Cllr Jamie Osborn</b></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><b>Response from the Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport</b></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.