

Infrastructure and Development Select Committee

**Minutes of the Meeting Held on Wednesday 18 January 2023
10.00am, held at County Hall, Norwich**

Present:

Cllr James Bensly – Chair

Cllr Steffan Aquerone

Cllr David Bills

Cllr Claire Bowes

Cllr Chris Dawson

Cllr Jim Moriarty

Cllr William Richmond

Cllr Chrissie Rumsby

Cllr Robert Savage

Cllr Barry Stone

Cllr Vic Thomson – Deputy Chair

Cllr Maxine Webb

Cllr Tony White

Also Present:

Simon Hughes

Steve Miller

Matt Hayward

Charlotte Watts

John Jones

Nicola Ledain

Tom McCabe

Denise Saadvandi

Karl Rands

Sarah Rhoden

Director of Property, Finance and Commercial Services, NCC

Director, Culture and Heritage, CES, NCC

Lead Project Manager, CES

Lead Project Manager (Delivery - Green Spaces), CES

Head of Environment, CES

Committee Officer, Democratic Services

Executive Director, CES

Head of Service – Adult Learning, CES

Assistant Director, Highway Services, CES

Director of Community Learning and Information CES

1. Apologies and substitutions

- 1.1 There were no apologies received as all Members of the Committee were present.

2. Minutes

- 2.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 18 November 2022 were agreed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

3. Declarations of Interest

- 3.1 Cllr Maxine Webb and Cllr David Bills declared 'other' interests as they were members on the Adult Learning Steering Group which could be discussed at item 9.

4. Items of Urgent Business

- 4.1 There were no items of urgent business.

- 4.2 The Chairman highlighted that Anglian Water were intending to return to a further Scrutiny Committee meeting. The Executive Director added that they were aware of the public concerns and wanted to demonstrate through actions that they were taking it seriously.

5. Public Question Time

- 5.1 There was one public questions received and the responses are appended at appendix A.

6. Local Member Issues / Questions

- 6.1 There were two local Member questions received and these are appended at appendix A.

7. Development of the NCC Herbicide Policy

- 7.1 The Committee received the annexed report which, following previous discussion at the Committee and Cabinet, included the Glyphosate Policy for recommendation to Cabinet for approval. An officer-led working group from various departments of the Council had developed the policy and a consultant had been appointed with specialist knowledge of the subject area to assist with development of the policy.
- 7.2 The Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste introduced the report.
- 7.2.1 John Jones added that as the Chair of the Officer Working group of the development of the policy, he gave thanks to fellow officers for their time and expertise in developing the policy.
- 7.3 The following points were noted in response to questions by the Committee;
- 7.3.1 Officers reported that information that would be disseminated they would be working with local communications to produce a reduced, straightforward document that would be available once the policy was adopted. A set of training modules which could be available to communities if they so wished, but predominantly for tenant farmers etc, would be developed. The briefing papers would hopefully be available within a month after the adoption of the policy.
- 7.3.2 There had been a consultation regarding reducing the use of Glyphosate on the highway network which if agreed would see a reduction of its use by 50%. The result of the consultation was unknown and closed on 16 December 2022. This would mean treating the highway once per year, as opposed to twice per year as it was currently. Out of the 5733 litres that were used per year, Highways used 5570 litres so by reducing the spraying to once, it would effectively halve the overall usage of Glyphosate. The other alternative to using the chemical was the mechanical removal of the weed, which wasn't carbon efficient or cost efficient. The policy was hoping to strike the balance between all of the tensions. Members commented that by reducing the verge spraying, it could potentially make the verges look worse and some careful thought needed to go into that decision.
- 7.3.3 The guidance and support regarding the use of Glyphosate needed to be proactive and there was a good relationship with NCC and tenants and third parties. It would be clear and attractive to them to contact NCC for guidance and advice. This was

achievable within the resources already available. Officers also added that many landowners did not like using Glyphosate due to costs amongst other factors so where there was an option to reduce that costs, previous experience has shown that farmers would be in favour.

- 7.3.4 The use of Glyphosate varied between farms due to farm ground condition, weather condition and other factors. Therefore, work had not been carried out to identify how much was used and it would be difficult to monitor it.
- 7.2.5 One Member commented that the length of the report was unnecessary, particularly the technical reports. It may have been in the Committee's better interest to have received a paragraph summary on the main key points. This would be noted for future reports.
- 7.2.6 Members noted that they were pleased to see the report being brought forward and was an important part of an environmental agenda. It would be good to see even more reduction in the chemical on council owned land.
- 7.2.7 Members asked the Officers what would be used to get rid of Ragwort if Glyphosate wasn't used. Landowners spent thousands per year trying to get rid of Ragwort. Officers explained that Ragwort was a notifiable weed and in some parts of Norfolk was a menace and was difficult to keep on top of. Before removing Ragwort, NCC would always check to ensure that adjacent landowners had removed from their land first before Highways took any action. Treating Ragwort was costly and labour intensive due to pulling it up and disposing of it. There was a targeted approach to dealing with Ragwort although it was not often a high priority to deal.
- 7.2.8 Members asked if the contracts with Academy Schools could include this policy or something similar. Officers explained that a lot of academy leases were nationally set, but there could be the possibility of working with local schools to advise and guide around production. The Chair asked if that could be investigated, and members kept up to date. Officers said they would talk to their education colleagues but advised that the education sector was very busy.
- 7.2.9 Officers reported that they had a have a watching brief over market developments of anything that could be used instead of Glyphosate. They also had regular contact with the John Inness Centre so if anything arose, it would be known about quickly.
- 7.2.10 Officers reported that 15% of Glyphosate used in Norfolk was used in Norwich. Officers supported the view that what could work in rural areas would not necessarily work in urban areas. If the policy was approved, then Officers would be having conversations with colleagues at Norwich City Council about their approach to using Glyphosate. Members supported the idea that to effectively reduce the use of Glyphosate, it needed a joint approach. Although working with other Local Authorities was not part of the policy, Officers confirmed that it was part of Norfolk County Council's ethos to work with other local authorities and would take place at an operational level.
- 7.3 It was noted, at his request, that Cllr Tony White voted **AGAINST** the recommendations.
- 7.4 The Committee
1. **RECOMMENDED** the NCC Glyphosate Policy to the Cabinet (Appendix A)

2. **NOTED** the Operational Plan (appended for information only – Appendix D)

8. Greenways to Greenspaces – Green Travel and Green Networks along our Highways Corridors

- 8.1 The Select Committee received the report which provided detail on progress made on the above and proposals to develop this work to 2024. Work had started on assessing the quality of our existing Roadside Nature Reserves (RNR's) and prioritising areas for pilot projects for roadside nature recovery. We have researched specific locations for pilots and are ready to develop these for planting this winter. In addition to cutting-led pilots on the wider roadside verge network these results will feed into the emerging Roadside Verge Management Policy.
- 8.2 Officers added that since the report had been published, a successful bid through Active Travel England had been released which would support the Active Travel Programme as mentioned on page 274 of the report.
- 8.3 The following points were noted in response to questions from the Committee:
- 8.3.1 Members commented that work had been undertaken in Mile Cross with Norfolk Wildlife on the trees and butterfly highways. It had been noted that more people were wanting to learn about the best plants for the verges and were happy to become educated. The uptake of this had increased as the work had continued and the attendance at the meetings was also increasing
- 8.3.2 Officers acknowledged that there were already Parish Councils who were actively verge cutting and had responsibility of that themselves, and noted it was important to support them. A programme of support was going to be developed and delivered to Parish Councils through Norfolk Association of Local Councils. Members would be informed when this happened so they could follow this up at meetings.
- 8.3.4 Officers reported that page 274 explained a breakdown of work packages where the new funding would be spent. They were currently working with highways colleagues on the design of the schemes and these and the progress of the work packages would be shared with Members.
- 8.3.5 The Verge Management Policy would hopefully accommodate the best time to cut the verges, to avoid the times when the flowering verges were in bloom. Members noted that where there are no visibility issues verges should not be cut as it was a waste of money and was supporting various insects. Officers explained that it was a case of trying to find the efficiencies where the times of cutting could be altered. There was also an opportunity to do a communications exercise around what good biodiversity looked like.

8.4 RESOLVED

That the Select Committee **REVIEWED** and **COMMENTED** on the following proposals prior to consideration by Cabinet:

1. A programme to strategically identify new RNR's
2. Implement Roadside Nature Recovery Demonstrator Pilots
3. Increase evidence for the emerging Highways Verge Management Policy
4. Active Travel Programme for 2023/2024

5. Green Infrastructure (Delivery) Programme 2021-2024

9. Adult Learning Annual Plan

- 9.1 The Committee received the annexed report which set out the Annual Plan. The Annual Plan set out the service's vision 'Changing lives through inspirational learning with exceptional support' and linked service delivery to Norfolk's strategic objectives, as detailed in the Better Together, for Norfolk Strategy 2021-25. Adult Learning's proposed key priorities were the same as Norfolk's key priorities. This paper also set out how the service's proposed strategic and operational activities contributed to Norfolk's priorities.
- 9.2 The following points were noted in response to questions from the Committee:
- 9.2.1 The booking system continues to be improved following a few minor issues. The issues had gradually been resolved and it was being continually monitored to ensure it was working for all service users.
- 9.2.2 The Committee noted that the plan was good news for Norfolk residents and gave their congratulations
- 9.2.3 It was noted that while the academic side of the service remains very successful; Dads Matters and other family learning programmes has had a massive impact on fathers and being able to relate to their children. It also allowed parents to support their children and help their children with their education. This in turn would influence employment outcomes, as being able to help their children with their learning, such as literacy and numeracy, would hopefully mean that they achieved more at school. Other programmes, such as Cooking on a Budget also had important value, especially in the current financial times. It would be a programme that through the Multiply Scheme, would be offered more. Both programmes added great value to participants.
- 9.2.4 The Committee heard that the newly created hubs in Great Yarmouth and King's Lynn which were due to be opened in 2024 and 2025 respectively, were crucial to the areas and there was a real need for them. Currently there wasn't the facilities to be able to offer what was needed. By close working with the libraries, and being able to use them, a wider range and increased number of courses will be offered. It was the service's focus that Norfolk's funding was spent on those who most needed it. By working to develop the hubs, the service was working closely with East Coast College to extend progression routes. There was also a close relationship with Multiply, to try and increase the learners from that area. The Great Yarmouth hub would be situated in the middle of the town, so people would not need their own transport, and this was important.
- 9.2.5 The overall aim was to increase employment outcomes and pay outcomes in an area where pay was less than the national average. It was the aim to give people the skills to secure better employment. The service attracted a high proportion of female learners because of various reasons, including the flexibility of how the courses were run and where they were run. It was noted that 33% of learners on construction courses in the first six months of 2022 were female.
- 9.2.6 There was concern expressed that funding could be withdrawn for the family learning programmes if proposed changes in further education policy go ahead, as

they did not have a direct employment outcome. The point was also raised that with devolution on the horizon, it was hoped that use could be made of the skills that already existed within the service.

- 9.2.7 Members acknowledged that the service were always inclusive of those with special educational needs or additional needs, and they were congratulated on this.
- 9.2.8 The report noted the size of the cohort of Syrian refugees, and the Committee asked if an up-to-date number of Afghan refugees on roll could be provided. The response would be given in writing.

9.3 **RESOLVED**

That the Select Committee

1. **NOTED** Adult Learning's exceptional performance and contribution to Norfolk priorities.
2. Considered and commented on the Adult Learning Annual Plan for 2023-24 and beyond, in advance of a cabinet decision on 6th March 2023.

10. **Forward Work Programme**

- 10.1 The Select Committee received the report by the Executive Director of Community and Environmental Services which set out the Forward Work Programme for the Committee to enable the Committee to review and shape.
- 10.2 Having reviewed the report, the Select Committee **AGREED** the Forward Work Programme set out in Appendix A.

The meeting closed at 11:37am

Chair



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Infrastructure and Development Select Committee
18 January 2023
Public & Local Member Questions

Agenda item 5	Public Question Time
5.1	<p>Question from Martin Schmierer</p> <p>Residents in particular in the north city centre have complained of the chronic lack of secure communal cycle storage provision. This is a part of the city with a high proportion of flats which means cycle storage can be difficult. In London commitments have been made to install 30,000 new cycle hangars. Will the council follow London's lead and commit to introducing similar cycle hangars at the earliest opportunity especially in parts of the county with a high proportion of flats and HMOs?</p> <p>Response from the Chair</p> <p>It is recognised that cycle storage can be difficult in areas where housing is dense and there is less space for cycles to be stored at individual residences. As part of developing Local Cycle and Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIPs) across Norfolk, we are looking at the different options there are to addressing this and cycle hangars are one way of providing secure cycle storage on the carriageway, footway or communal areas. There are a number of factors to take into account and these are currently being considered before a decision can be made whether to commit to rolling out cycle hangars. These include the identification of appropriate space, how access to these units will be arranged and managed and how such units would be maintained and by whom. In many areas, space would need to be created by removing car parking provision, so this would need to be subject to local consultation and support.</p> <p>We will look to see what lessons can be learnt from what London is delivering. Funding for the installation and maintenance would need to be secured and we would seek to balance the funding needs of cycle parking with that of providing cycle lanes and delivering behaviour change programmes aimed at increasing levels of cycling.</p>
Agenda item 6	Local Member Issues/Questions
6.1	<p>Question from Cllr Steffan Aquerone</p> <p>Regarding the new Household Waste Recycling Centre near Sheringham, what is the exact current state of the negotiation with Denny Construction?</p> <p>Response from the Chair</p> <p>On 31 January 2022 the principles of the acquisition for a replacement recycling centre were agreed by Cabinet. The subsequent lease is subject to the County Council securing all relevant consents and in support of that site surveys have been undertaken and a planning application is expected very shortly.</p> <p>Second question from Cllr Steffan Aquerone</p> <p>Several of my communities are grateful for the news that the Director of Highways and Waste has instructed a refill of grit bins. However, I would like to know when</p>

Norfolk County Council's policy became to refill only at the behest of the Director of services, rather than when communities run out of grit? In one case the bin still invites people to call Highways if the grit runs low!

Response from the Chair

There are over 1900 grit bins available across the county for use by the public. The grit bins are checked prior to each winter season and filled as required, typically in November and December. The decision to replenish grit bins is based on an assessment of the predicted weather conditions, resource availability and call volumes requesting bins to be filled; this usually takes place after Christmas.

Taking these considerations into account, an operational instruction is issued by the Director of Highways, Transport & Waste to refill grit bins countywide. The refill commencement date is communicated to the public with assistance from the Press Office and to callers who make such requests to the Customer Service Centre.

The second grit bin fill commenced on 9 January 2023.