

## **Cabinet**

### **Minutes of the Meeting held on 29 January 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 Bill Borrett	Cabinet Member for Public Health and Wellbeing
Cllr Penny Carpenter	Cabinet Member for Children's Services
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

**Executive Directors Present:**

Harvey Bullen	Director of Strategic Finance
Debbie Bartlett	Interim Executive Director of Adult Social Services
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 No apologies were received

**2 Minutes from the meeting held on 04 December 2023**

- 2.1 Cabinet agreed the minutes of the meeting held on Monday, 04 December 2023 as an accurate record.

**3 Declaration of Interests**

- 3.1 No interests were declared.

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

- 4.1 No matters were referred.

## **5 Update from the Chair/Cabinet Members**

5.1 The Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care gave an update:

- The Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care stated that no Cabinet Member or Councillors wanted to have to make such challenging financial decisions which would impact residents, however, would have to make decisions requiring savings to be made, falling against the backdrop of rising demand and falling government settlements.
- Some of the budgets in Adult Social Services would be worrying for residents.
- Cabinet would be asked to consider and recommend the budget for 2024-25 to Full Council. One proposal included a request to start a consultation on changes to the Adult Social Services charging policy, including a reduction in the Minimum Income Guarantee. This would generate recurrent savings because the funding from Government was falling but costs were increasing.
- A meaningful consultation would be undertaken on changes to the Minimum Income Guarantee, which would start on the 19 February 2024 and run for 12 weeks. This would give time for people to respond, and to give support to those who would be impacted, and work with the charging reference group.
- After the consultation period, responses would be analysed, and an Equality Impact Assessment would be completed. After this, Cabinet would consider proposals in light of this and other factors to decide whether to proceed with the proposal or seek savings elsewhere in Adult Social Services.
- Recent Government funding announcement was welcome but was for one year only. The conditions and fine details would not be clear until the final Government settlement was announced. Cabinet would not consider lowering Minimum Income Guarantee below the national statutory minimum which was £171.75 per week for people aged 25-65 and £150.25 per week for people aged 18-25.

## **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.

6.2.1 Nick Taylor asked a supplementary question:

- Mr Taylor thought that the Government's announcement for more funding for Adult Social Services would encourage Cabinet to defer their decision to make changes to the Minimum Income Guarantee, especially given the impact this would have on disabled people in Norfolk.
- He asked, if a 10% cut to people's money was necessary to save Norfolk County Council money, whether Cabinet Members would agree to a 10 % reduction in their allowance, as Cabinet Members were able to supplement their allowance with income, which not all disabled people were able to.

6.2.2 The Vice Chair replied that it was the decision of all councillors to do what they would like to with their allowance. The budget which Cabinet would consider would demonstrate the challenging financial position of the council which was also replicated across the country. The Government's funding announcement

was welcome but the full detail of this was still being waited for. The Vice Chair clarified that there was a need for the Council to make sustainable and long-term savings balanced alongside statutory responsibilities, meaning that difficult decisions would need to be considered alongside the services the Council supplied. It was right to carry out a consultation as set out in the budget report, and no commitment could be given about the proposals at this point. No final decision would be made about Minimum Income Guarantee at this point and the Vice Chair encouraged everyone to respond to the consultation when it was launched.

- 6.2.3 The Chair noted Mr Taylor's passion and that the Council was listening to the public; she encouraged Mr Taylor to take part in the consultation.

## **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. Fee Levels for Adult Social Services providers**

- 8.1.1 Cabinet received the report setting proposals for the fee levels provided to Adult Social Services providers by Norfolk County Council for 2024-25.
- 8.1.2 The Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care introduced the report to Cabinet:
- This report introduced an annual process which set out the annual support for the care market by the Council.
  - Norfolk invested £415m in Adult Social Services processes. There was a proposal in the report to give £23.2m to the care market this year in addition to the £48m given over the previous 2 years. This was in context of wider challenges that the market faced.
  - The Council had a duty to support the wider care market as well as its own services. The impact of in-year and one-off funding was challenging.
  - If any provider felt that the uplift be provided to them was not enough, they could go through an open book process, but the Council were keen to engage with providers about wider support that the Council could provide that would reduce costs.
  - The rise in national living wage was welcome but would also impact the budget of the Council and providers. The settlement in the paper mitigated this increase for providers, while retaining some funding in the Council to meet demand related to this.
- 8.2 The Cabinet Member for Public Health and Prevention endorsed the report which gave an additional £23.2m for the care market in addition to the increases given in previous years. Vulnerable people relied on services provided by this market.
- 8.3 Cabinet **RESOLVED** to:
1. Agree to award a £23.2m fee uplift, as set out in section 3.
  2. Note the risks presented in this paper due to the need to balance financial pressures for the market alongside affordability to the County Council.
  3. Note mitigating actions as part of wider County Council budget setting decisions including the need to lobby Government for fair funding for Norfolk.
  4. Agree the implementation of the fee uplift exercise described in section 3 of

this paper.

#### 8.4 **Evidence and Reasons for Decision**

Please see section 5 of the report.

#### 8.5 **Alternative Options**

The option recommended within this report is affordable within the Council's budget planning approach and alternative options are not presented. However, Members could choose to make different budget decisions as part of the County Council budget process.

### 9. **Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) Funding**

9.1.1 Cabinet received the report setting out changes to the distribution for the Dedicated Schools Grant from April 2024 in line with the Department of Education's (DfE) National Funding Formula arrangements.

9.1.2 The Cabinet Member for Children's Services introduced the report to Cabinet:

- This report outlined changes for distribution of Dedicated Schools Grant in line with the National Funding Formula. Each year the Government provided funding for all schools that ensured funding was fair and met pupil needs.
- School funding was provided through the Dedicated Schools Grant and ringfenced through Local Authorities and distributed through local authority formulae following consultation with local schools.
- The Cabinet Member for Children's Services thanked the Norfolk Schools' Forum for their help in reaching the decision set out in the report.
- The Local Authority was also responsible for setting the formula for Early Years Funding. Government changes to Early Years Parental Funding details were shown on page A4 of the report.
- The Cabinet Member for Children's Services moved the recommendations as set out in the report.

9.2 The Vice Chair also thanked Norfolk Schools Forum for their work on this.

9.3 The Cabinet Member for Public Health and Prevention supported the proposals set out in the report noting that it was important to focus time and investment at those in the most need of support. The extra money for the high needs block was welcomed.

9.4 Cabinet **RESOLVED** to agree:

1. the Dedicated Schools Grant funding including
  - a. the changes to the schools funding formula;
  - b. the changes to the early years funding entitlements formula;
  - c. agreeing the high needs block budget, noting that it has been assessed to meet our statutory duties and it adds to the Dedicated Schools Grant cumulative;
2. to delegate decision making powers to the Executive Director of Children's Services, in conjunction with the Lead Member for Children's Services, to agree the final unit values, whilst still mirroring the National Funding Formula, once the final Dedicated Schools Grant calculations of individual

school allocations are known and in line with the principles of Cabinet's decision.

## **9.5 Evidence and Reasons for Decision**

Please see section 4 of the report.

## **9.6 Alternative Options**

Please see section 5 of the report.

## **10. Annual Investment and Treasury Strategy 2024-25**

10.1.1 Cabinet received the report which presented the Council's borrowing and investment strategies for 2024-25.

10.1.2 The Vice Chair introduced the report to Cabinet:

- This was the most important treasury report to Cabinet of the three which were brought each year.
- This report covered future capital investment plans along with the prudential indicators to ensure the Council was not over-borrowing, the minimum revenue provision policy and the investment strategy.
- The council was required to operate a balanced budget, meaning what the council raised it could spend. The treasury function helped the council do this by monitoring cashflow to ensure money was available when needed and surplus was invested in liquid, low risk assets, and via treasury management which helped facilitate planned investments and meet repayment obligations over the long-term.
- All prudential indicators were being met but capital financial requirements were the most significant were shown at paragraph 2.2 of the report. The Council was under-borrowed as shown in the graph on page 85.
- Higher interest rates meant that all capital bids had been reviewed. Using cash balances and delaying capital programme requirements which were not externally financed would reduce the net financing need for the current year from £60.064m to £0. This was due to cash balances held by the Council, shown at paragraph 2.4 of the report, which had allowed funding of expenditure through the use of cash balances rather than borrowing. The cash balances were due to Government funding of key projects.
- The strategy remained consistent with capital strategy set out in 2023; slippage had been included into calculations to account for the ongoing gap between aspirations and the actual completion of projects. As interest rates rose, a threshold of 3.5% had been set before adding to borrowing.
- More emphasis had been put on strategically managing timing of borrowing and management of the cash position.
- 2024-25 treasury management strategy was linked to the capital strategy with both projecting the same slippage, with an aim of giving a clear target in management of contracts and projects.
- Advice from external advisors was to not borrow and allow cash balances to fall to £180m. This would mean borrowing need to be increased eventually, but cash balances would allow under borrowing to be maintained in the medium-term. The council would borrow only £50m per year when interest rates dipped. This may be revised in future years.

- The Minimum Revenue Provision Policy was the same as in previous years. Due to revenue budget constraints, there had been no more voluntary Minimum Revenue Provision set aside since 2021-22. This reflected use of capital receipts to finance assets with low useful economic lives such as IT equipment and vehicles.
- This report was to be taken in conjunction with the Capital Strategy, at item 11 on the agenda.

10.2 Cabinet **RESOLVED** to agree and to recommend to County Council the Annual Investment and Treasury Strategy for 2024-25 as set out in Annex 1 of the report, including:

- The Capital Prudential Indicators included in the body of the report.
- The Minimum Revenue Provision Statement 2024-25 in Appendix 1 of the report.
- The list of approved counterparties at Appendix 4 of the report.
- The Treasury Management Prudential Indicators detailed in Appendix 5 of the report.

For inclusion within the policy framework

10.3 **Evidence and Reasons for Decision**

Please see section 4 of the report.

10.4 **Alternative Options**

In order to achieve sound treasury management in accordance with the statutory and other guidance, no viable alternative options have been identified to the recommendation in this report.

**11. Capital Strategy and Programme 2024-25**

11.1.1 Cabinet received the report presenting the proposed capital strategy and programme and including information on the funding available to support that programme.

11.1.2 The Vice Chair introduced the report to Cabinet:

- The capital programme was set prior to each financial year, which focussed on the delivery of core objectives set out in Better Together for Norfolk, which were all connected.
- The Vice Chair was grateful to the Council for taking full advantage of the County Deal to get significant additional funding for Norfolk County Council. This would be the first step on the road to increased devolution for Norfolk and would give significant ring-fenced capital funding to improve infrastructure as part of the Norfolk Investment Fund.
- Until 2022, it was appropriate to increase prudential borrowing, however, the change in borrowing rates meant that more control was needed on capital spend. The prioritisation model was set out in the report and ensured that the Council would not exceed £50m borrowing per year.
- As local authorities became more complex, it was important for Government to understand the long-term context that investment decisions were made in and financial risks. Decisions not to underwrite spending on external investments by Norfolk County Council had been

wise. The relative success in dealing with an inadequate funding regime was had by transforming and renewing services using best practice and technology. The Capital Programme supported this long term view.

- This report showed that the council took capital expenditure and investment in line with service objectives taking into account stewardship, value for money, prudence, sustainability and affordability.
- Development of the Capital Strategy was in the context of ensuring the overall strategy was complemented and ensuring that governance procedures and risks were understood by all Members.
- The Council would look to contain capital borrowing within the £50m limit going forward and had introduced slippage into spending departments to relate the proposed programme into what can be achieved and reschedule programmes over a longer period or discontinue plans which did not meet the prioritisation programme.
- This Strategy would allow the Council to deliver on its manifesto pledges including:
  - investing in libraries, through maintaining current ones and developing community hubs such as those in Great Yarmouth and King's Lynn
  - investing in museums such as the Norwich Castle Keep project.
  - £2.1m spent on cultural heritage facilities across the county.
  - £44.7m investment in housing with care schemes and £13m in integrated equipment community services.
  - Rollout of the fibre network across rural Norfolk.
  - Building new Special Educational Needs and Disabilities schools, mainstream schools and Special Resource Bases .
  - Investing in physical infrastructure to help people get to work and home quickly and cheaply and allow investment in the county such as new road schemes.
  - Key industries such as supporting the operations maintenance facility in Great Yarmouth and development of business hubs at Scottow and Hethel Engineering
- All Government agencies were feeling the effects of cuts but through effective joined up working, efficient targeting of funding and resources could be brought forward.
- The Devolution deal would add to the successes brought to Norfolk. The latest tranche of levelling up saw good bids from Kings Lynn. New schemes to be added to the 2024-28 programme included work on County Farms, Norfolk Fire and Rescue, road resurfacing, Norse energy and other small corporate property schemes.
- Children's Services continued to develop Special Educational Needs and Disabilities schools and upgrade mainstreams schools, or build new ones where needed.
- Adult Social Services continued with its housing with care programme to give 11 new care villages in Norfolk.
- Development and maintenance of the transport network would continue, including projects such as the Long Stratton Bypass, Norwich Western Link and West Winch Housing Access Road. £34.5m was planned to be spent on road safety and public transport initiatives.
- The revenue budget provides resources to build on Children's Services following its good Ofsted report and development of the transformation programme for Adult Social Services and enhancing services through Community and Environmental Services, this capital programme set out

the long-term commitment to put in place infrastructure to deliver services by reducing future expense and providing better services.

- 11.2 The Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport noted the road programmes included within the strategy such as Transforming Cities Fund which would provide improvements to roads, cycling and walking facilities in Norwich, as well as Active Travel improvements and the road resurfacing fund.
- 11.3 The Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care thanked the Council for the financial commitment to the Long Stratton Bypass. Work had begun and was welcomed by the community. She also welcomed the commitment to the housing with care schemes which would help people to remain living in a secure environment with independence. She hoped that nutrient neutrality would be solved soon which was delaying some of these schemes.
- 11.4 The Cabinet Member for Public Health and Prevention noted that the capital programme was £203m for the next year, and over 1bn in the next 5 years. It included the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities transformation programme, investing in infrastructure and roads, ambitions around big infrastructure projects such as the Long Stratton Bypass and Great Yarmouth Third River Crossing. Pressures in spending were because of demographic changes of people living longer meaning that people needed support for longer. The projects in the strategy would make the best use of investment.
- 11.5 The Cabinet Member for Corporate Services and Innovation welcomed the strategy which showed the Council was committed to providing a forward-thinking property portfolio through replacing outdated assets; this would save money in the long run and provide quality assets for the community.
- 11.6 The Deputy Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care noted the pressures faced across the county with the aging population and changing demographic, and the wide-ranging issues seen.
- 11.7 The Cabinet Member for Communities and Partnerships pointed out the reprofiling of investment for Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service equipment and vehicles, as well as work which was taking place to ensure gender compliance. She also mentioned the funding for libraries and development of community hubs which was key.
- 11.8 The Vice Chair discussed that relationships had been developed with Department for Transport and Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) to bring increased funding into the County, and when combined with work with the Department for Education and other departments the funding could be used to deliver substantial projects. The Vice Chair commended officers for their work obtaining funding.
- 11.9 The Chair noted that the Government had confidence that Norfolk could deliver major road building schemes to reduce air pollution and improve people's lives. Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service improvements were essential with the recent incidents of field and agricultural fires. The development of with care schemes was a positive way to provide people with independence for longer. The capital schemes set out in the report would provide positive changes for the people for Norfolk. Devolution would provide more funding for more infrastructure



improvements.

11.10 Cabinet **RESOLVED:**

1. To agree the Capital Strategy at Appendix A of the report as a framework for the prioritisation and continued development of the Council's capital programme;
2. To agree the proposed 2023-28+ capital programme of £1,134.982m, subject to the planned slippage of £253.0m and additional amounts for schemes yet to be re-profiled from 2023-24;
3. To agree to recommend the programme to the County Council for approval, including the new and extended capital schemes outlined in Appendix D of the report;
4. To agree to recommend to County Council the Council's Flexible Use of Capital Receipts Strategy for 2024-25 as set out in Section 5 of the report;
5. To note known grant settlements as summarised in Section 3 of the report and agree that future capital grants will be added to the programme when confirmed;
6. To note the forecast of estimated capital receipts to be generated to achieve the target of £21.37m, subject to market conditions, over the next four years to support schemes not funded from other sources, as set out in Table 8 of the report.

11.11 **Evidence and Reasons for Decision**

The attached Annex to the report summarises the development of the proposed capital programme, including proposed new schemes, and a summary of forecast capital receipts.

11.12 **Alternative Options**

The papers appended to this report represent the culmination of the process to develop capital schemes to be recommended to Full Council which will improve services, promote efficiencies, and address deficiencies. However, at this stage it remains the case that new capital proposals have not been agreed and could be removed from the proposed capital programme.

**12. Finance Monitoring Report 2023-24 P8: November 2023**

12.1.1 Cabinet received the report providing 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.

12.1.2 The Vice Chair introduced the report to Cabinet:

- The forecast set out in the report showed that the Council was in balance and the Vice Chair was confident that this would continue to be the case. This had been achieved through significant use of reserves. These one-off measures would not be available next year so ongoing savings would need to be found from all parts of the budget.
- In Children's Services, social care placements and home to school transport continued to cause pressure. Overspend for social care placements was £7m due to an increase in the average unit cost for external residential accommodation seen over the past year of £4.24m

and the cost of supporting a small number of children with extremely high needs of £2.42m.

- The Secretary of State recognised the difficulties seen in Children's Services across the country and this was why there was a steer towards Children's Services in the announcement of more funding from Michael Gove MP.
- Home to school transport was forecast to overspend by £6m despite additional resources allocated in 2023-24. This was due to supply-side factors such as inflationary costs on fuel and vehicles as well as reduced supply increasing the cost per child for both Special Educational Needs and Disabilities and mainstream children. Action was underway to impact demand and supply but a change in primary legislation was needed to reduce the spend on home to school transport.
- Adult Social Services' in-year position had deteriorated as the care market had seen increased pricing, especially in learning disability provision. The budget for older people's care was showing pressure due to rising costs and demand. Waiting lists had been reduced however this had increased the demand on home care with more people now requiring support. If demand was constant the pressures could be offset, however increases in demand which were being seen meant this was not the case.
- £30m had been invested into Adult Social Services as part of the 2023-24 fee uplift and an additional £23m would be invested this year.
- One in four people in Norfolk were over 65 and North Norfolk had the highest proportion of people aged over 65 in England and Wales. By 2040 it was estimated one third of the population of Norfolk would be over 65, which would mean more people living with conditions such as dementia, with a prediction that there would be 28% more people with dementia by 2030.
- Community and Environmental Services budgets had been affected by high electricity prices, with a £1.5m overspend, although this had been offset by savings elsewhere.
- The cost on the museums service had been affected by lower income during the Norwich Castle Keep project.
- Finance would have an underspend due to interest payable being £2.254m less than budgeted caused by timing of borrowing and low interest rates on borrowing. Interest receivable was now forecast at £4.558m which was higher than budgeted.
- The Minimum Revenue Provision for 2023-24 was £1m lower than planned due to capital programme slippage. £1.1m accumulated surplus business rates would be returned to the Council as part of the Business Rates Pool fund.
- The Council had healthy cash balances, which were forecast to be at £179.7m by the end of the year. If including additional borrowing budgeted for, balances would be at £244.7m. As there were healthy cash balances, no additional borrowing was anticipated in the calendar year.
- The capital programme would be £281.31m after slippage. Departmental breakdowns were shown in table 2 of the report.
- Table 4 of the report showed that £66.4m would be funded by prudential borrowing.
- Changes to the capital programme since December 2023 were shown on page 217 of the report which were mostly due to external funding in particular increased funding for museums projects. The Vice Chair

thanked the Chair of the National Lottery Heritage Fund for funding received.

- 12.2 The Cabinet Member for Public Health and Prevention was pleased to note that a balanced budget was predicted at a time of financial pressure.
- 12.3 The Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care pointed out the increase of demand seen in Adult Social Services. Reducing the interim care list had a knock-on effect by increasing the cost of care to be provided to people who had been waiting. The Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care noted that many providers in the learning disability sector were struggling; if a provider closed and new services needed to be found at short notice this could result in higher costs.
- 12.4 The Chair noted the fluctuation seen in this year in Adult Social Services and commended staff for their work. Extra money received from the National Lottery Heritage Fund had been a success and would help bring extra people into Norwich and boost the county's economy.
- 12.5 Cabinet **RESOLVED:**
1. To agree and to recommend to the Council the increase of £6.259m to the capital programme to address capital funding requirements funded mostly from various external sources as set out in detail in capital Appendix 3, paragraph 1.4 and 4.2 of the report as follows:
    - £0.189m increase in External Funding for various Highways schemes
    - £0.26m allocation of NCC Capital Receipts to support the compulsory purchase of land for County Farms
    - (£0.160m) reduction in External funding for various Children's Services Schools schemes to reflect actual expenditure in projects nearing completion
    - £1.579m grant funding for 24-25 received from the Department of Education for the expansion of Childcare provision in the County
    - £0.330m external funding the Corporate Property scheme at Chapel Road
    - £0.074m for the Norfolk Fire and Rescue Services (NFRS) Vehicle Replacement Programme
    - £0.053m for the LMS Schools Based capital maintenance programme
    - £0.460m additional S106 developer contribution to Dereham, Docking, Hopton and Holt
    - £0.105m additional external funding from Department of Transport and S106 for various Highways maintenance schemes
    - £0.260m additional DfT grant allocated to the Long Stratton Bypass
    - £0.195m additional contribution from Revenue and Reserves for the Hethel Improvement Commission
    - £2.821m funding received from the National Lottery Heritage Fund to offset the inflationary cost pressures on the Castle Keep Museum project
    - £0.018m contribution from Revenue and Reserves to fund the purchase of a new car for the ASC Road Safety Scheme
    - (£0.075m) other minor adjustments to capital schemes.
  2. To agree and to recommend to Council the approval the following amendments to the P10 Capital Programme for the following schemes as set out in Capital Appendix 3 paragraph 4.3 of the report as follows:

- £4.51m additional funding from the Department of Transport from the Road Resurfacing Fund for local highways maintenance in 2023-24 and again in 2024-25 alongside additional funding for the next 10 years as set out in Appendix 3 paragraph 4.3 of the report.
3. 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.
  4. 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 - Document.ashx (cmis.uk.com).
  5. To agree the period 8 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;
  6. To agree the period 8 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;
  7. To note the forecast General Balances at 31 March 2024 of £25.410m.

## 12.6 **Evidence and Reasons for Decision**

Please see section 4 of the report

## 12.7 **Alternative Options**

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

## 13. **2024-25 Revenue Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy 2024-28**

- 13.1.1 Cabinet received the report and appended papers which set out an overview of the Council's strategic and financial planning for 2024-25 to 2027-28 and detailed information to support Cabinet's Revenue Budget and council tax recommendations to the County Council, including the Director of Strategic Finance (Section 151 Officer's) statutory assessment of the robustness of the overall budget.
- 13.1.2 The Vice Chair introduced the report to Cabinet:
  - Last week's announcement of additional funding for local authorities by Government was the result of a successful campaign by Norfolk County Council, MPs and by the County Council Network. The extra funding would help protect frontline services, but difficult decisions were still needed when setting the budget for 2024-25 and in the medium term.
  - Service reductions would be necessary in some areas to balance the books and Norfolk County Council would need to propose a maximum council tax increase.
  - At £46m the budget gap in the medium term financial strategy was one of the largest the council had to bridge, second to the one for this year. This could be achieved but had left the council with fewer means to achieve this in the upcoming year, 2024-25. Savings of £26m were presented to Cabinet in October 2023 and a further £20m had to be found. Interest rates and better than expected tax from district councils meant that a

modest list of savings was needed to produce a balanced budget.

- The council was facing a further increase in the in year budget for Adult Social Services and Children's Services social care forecast at around £30m. the in-year position was mostly mitigated in Adult Social Services and partly mitigated in Children's Services by use of reserves, but these measures would not be available in future years.
- The original provisional settlement from Government was disappointing as it didn't address systemic pressures in Adult Social Services and Children's Services, but unexpected cuts to the service grant meant a £4.3m reduction in anticipated funding. Core spending power was expected to increase by 6.8 but, this was predicated on charging a full 4.99% increase in council tax. Council tax represented 56% of the council's assumed core spending power.
- In addition to unfunded costs such as increase in National Living Wage increase, this meant £33m additional savings needed to be found after the provisional settlement announcement made on the 18 December 2023.
- After the announcement of additional funding made on 24 January 2024 the additional £500m social care funding would be given to local authorities using the social care grant formula, and this was mainly for use in Children's Services but could also be used for Adult Social Services
- This would help ease pressure such as increasing demand and cost of social care and home to school transport but was for one year only.
- The Secretary of State announced an additional £15m for the Rural Services Delivery Grant. The national allocation was known but the final level of funding was unknown and the final settlement would be given by the 8 February 2024.
- Royal Services Delivery Grant was more predictable and £600,000 was expected, targeted towards Community and Environmental Services. The department was currently discussing areas in most risk of sustainability and deliverability.
- It was important to ensure savings were recurrent and ongoing.
- There would be a requirement to increase the adult and general precept of council tax by the maximum available; this would raise £24.926m.
- The Secretary of State's statement meant that the position was better than stated in the short term and the Council would spend more in Norfolk than last year. Since last February's budget, changes had been seen in the economy and public finance which had increased costs to the Council. The budget faced difficult decisions.
- All upper tier authorities faced difficult financial pressures from inflation, increased demand and growth in national living wage. Despite the funding from the final settlement this would result in a tight financial situation for local government.
- Economic and inflationary pressures were £9m higher than forecast. The impact of the national living wage had the highest impact on Children's Services and Adult Social Services.
- £25m provision had been set to allow for demographic changes, but changes to home to school transport and changes in Adult Social Services have increased above this. Table 4 showed the result of these increases.
- The net budget showed resident what council tax was spent on and the gross budget showed what the council spent as a whole.
- 14 authorities have issued bankruptcy notices since 2018 and some had

applied for emergency assistance. Norfolk, after using 70% of the net budget on Adult Social Services were still providing a huge range of non-statutory services. These were services such as subsidised bus services, footpaths, environmental work, museums and libraries. Despite one year funding allocations, the council took a long-term view of funding allocations and did not shy away from hard decisions and did not invest in commercial projects.

- In addition to funding, the Secretary of State said councils should publish productivity plans. Connecting communities was key to Adult Social Services' transformation plan and was on course to deliver £20m savings per year. Children's Services had worked on transformations based on practices proven to work elsewhere and most savings were therefore shown via transformation programmes. Making these efficiency programmes available for all residents to examine was good for accountability.
- After the report to Cabinet in October there were no items for consultation other than a consultation on the level of council tax; appendix 5 showed the results of the consultation on council tax. Less than 50% agreed with a decision to raise general tax, over 50% agreed with the decision to increase the social care precept
- A consultation on the items shown in para 10.6 of the report would start soon, including savings around recycling centres. The consultation would go ahead despite promised funding as there was no detail on the funding allocation which will come available after publication of the final settlement.
- Adult Social Services strategy Promoting Independence was the second stage of the strategy and had clear ambitions shown in the report. These were to deliver Adult Social Services in a sustainable way and in a way which would put prevention at the heart. The Financial strategy was on development of promoting development and demand management.
- Additional funding of demand led Children's Services meant it had increased as a percentage of net budget. The increase seen in the home to school meant that an increase had been built into the cost base going forward.
- In a meeting with a minister, the Vice Chair heard that an advisory board would be set up to reform the 1948 Education Act and review the 1914 Care Act. The Local Government Association and County Council Network analysis showed that by 2024-25 there would be an additional £15bn cost of delivering council services since 2021-22.
- Community and Environmental Services covered a huge range of services from libraries, museums, road maintenance, fire response and waste disposal. The services were used by most residents and visitors every day. Through this department, Norfolk was focused on as a place; a key milestone was reached last year when Norfolk agreed to proceed with a level 3 County Deal which included a Norfolk Investment Fund of £600m over 30 years to support economic growth which would be drawn down from September 2024. £15m of additional projects had been agreed for delivery across the County.
- The business transformation and smarter working team were key to the drive to reshape the organisation during transformation using lessons learned to de-silo where possible. Delivering change in an organisation as large as Norfolk County Council was difficult but it was important to take service users, residents and staff with us.
- Table 14 on the report set out the starting £46m gap, further £31m

legislative requirements and £27m demographic pressures. The savings necessary had been made helped partly by a better Government settlement, which required a 4.99% increase in council tax. the Vice Chair believed that in February 2024, a robust budget could be presented to full council which helped the council prepare for the future council landscape.

- Can present a robust budget to full council which prepares us for
- The Medium Term Financial Strategy primary objective was to show a balanced position over 4 years; further savings needed to be identified and a balanced budget for 24-25 was proposed with gaps remaining in future years. Next year, 25-26 had a slightly lower gap at £43m. Sustainable savings were therefore important to make rather than one-offs.
- Ongoing reforms were expected in the coming financial year due to cultural shifts in practice; Adult Social Services preventative measures to reduce costs were not statutory but would be important if services could be maintained.
- Most council services were delivered through partners, third parties and wholly owned subsidiaries Norse. Demographics meant demand continued to rise and Cabinet would review a procurement strategy with more challenge on reprocurement and better use of technology.
- Longer term certainty was important for robust decision making. The Local Government financial settlement continued to provide one-year settlements and one-off grants making this difficult.
- Cabinet would continue to advocate for Norfolk, press for reforms from Government and the next stage of devolution.

13.2 The Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport was pleased that the letter sent by the 44 MPs had resulted in additional Government funding. Norfolk County Council was providing for its citizens in a cost-effective way with an ambition to grow Norfolk's Economy. He felt the Medium-Term Financial Strategy was positive, but more work was needed to encourage Government to give local authorities more funding.

13.3 The Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste was impressed by the work shown by the Vice Chair and officers to come up with an effective balanced budget. Proposed changes to opening times of recycling centres would go to consultation. Where changes had been made in other parts of the country there had been no impact on fly tipping levels. There was also a proposal to introduce a booking system at recycling centres; a Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) survey found over 40% of all local authorities had a booking system in place. At centres where a survey was carried out there was an overall positive response to the booking system.

13.4 The Cabinet Member for Communities and Partnerships thanked the Vice Chair and officers who had developed the budget.

13.5 The Chair also thanked the Vice Chair for his work alongside Officers who had worked on this budget. Council was working smarter and using technology and this work would continue through transformation. The Chair thanked MPs and the County Council Network for the lobbying they did through central government to achieve the additional funding announced on the 19 January. Not all councils were equal, as shown by those who had to declare a section 114. Norfolk County Council would do its very best for the people of Norfolk and go to consultation when needed. There would need to be difficult decisions.

- 13.6 The Vice Chair thanked finance officers for their work and the support from all spending departments for developing a balanced budget.
- 13.7 the Vice Chair put forward an amendment to recommendation 1a to encompass the changes from the additional funding announcement from Government, as shown in italic:
- a) that any additional resources which become available should be used to delay the use of one-off funding from reserves from 2024-25 to 2025-26, or to establish a budget contingency *to add further growth items and consider the scope to remove or defer savings, or*
- 13.8 Cabinet **RESOLVED:**
- 1) To note the statements regarding the uncertain planning environment, robustness of budget estimates, assumptions and risks relating to the 2024-25 budget, and authorise the Director of Strategic Finance, in consultation with the Leader of the Council and the Cabinet Member for Finance, to make any changes required to reflect Final Local Government Finance Settlement information (if available), or changes in council tax and business rates forecasts from District Councils, in order to maintain a balanced budget position for presentation to Full Council. In recognition of the budget gap forecast for 2025-26 and to enable a final balanced Budget position to be recommended to County Council, Cabinet agreed the following principles:
    - a) that any additional resources which become available should be used to delay the use of one-off funding from reserves from 2024-25 to 2025-26, or to establish a budget contingency, to add further growth items and consider the scope to remove or defer savings, or
    - b) that any income shortfall should be addressed from the Corporate Business Risk Reserve (to the extent possible). Where the Corporate Business Risk Reserve is insufficient, to note that the ultimate source of funding to balance the Budget will be the General Fund.
  - 2) To note that a number of further savings have been developed to support the preparation of a balanced budget since the initial list of proposals considered by Cabinet in October 2023, some of which may require consultation or equality impact assessment that will be undertaken as soon as possible.  
Cabinet:
    - a) agreed that the proposals subject to further consultation will be brought back to Cabinet for final decision making during 2024-25;
    - b) agreed that in the event that proposals cannot be implemented in 2024-25, either following consultation and equality impact assessment, or as a result of subsequent member decision making, the following approach would be adopted:
      - i) One-off options would be sought to deliver a balanced Budget.
      - ii) In order to achieve a robust and sustainable financial position, service departments would be asked to identify alternative recurrent proposals to replace the one-off measures in-year; and
      - iii) In the event that recurrent 2024-25 proposals cannot be found, service departments will be asked to bring forward ongoing replacement savings at the same level for 2025-26 and proposals that enable the one-off resources used in 2024-25 to be replenished.
  - 3) To note the findings of public consultation as set out in Section 14 Appendix 1 of the report, and in full in Appendix 5 of the report, and considered these



when recommending the budget changes required to deliver a balanced budget as set out in Appendix 1 of the report.

- 4) To note the findings of equality impact assessments, as set out in Appendix 6 to the report, and in doing so, noted the Council's duty under the Equality Act 2010 to have due regard to the need to:
  - Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Act;
  - Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it; and
  - Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
- 5) To note that the Council has responded to the consultation undertaken on the Provisional Local Government Settlement for 2024-25 as detailed in Section 3 of Appendix 1 of the report.
- 6) To note that the Council will continue to operate a Business Rates Pool for 2024-25 in partnership with Norfolk District Councils on the same terms as the existing 2023-24 Pool and as set out in Section 6 of Appendix 1 of the report and approve the use of 2023-24 Pool funds as set out.
- 7) To agree to recommend to County Council:
  - a) The level of risk and budget assumptions set out in the Robustness of Estimates report (Appendix 4 of the report), which underpin the revenue and capital budget decisions and planning for 2024-28.
  - b) The general principle of seeking to increase general fund balances as part of closing the 2023-24 accounts and that in 2024-25 any further additional resources which become available during the year should be added to the general fund balance wherever possible.
  - c) The findings of public consultation (Appendix 5 of the report), which should be considered when agreeing the 2024-25 Budget (Appendix 1 of the report).
  - d) To note the advice of the Director of Strategic Finance (Section 151 Officer), in Section 5 of Appendix 1 of the report, on the financial impact of an increase in council tax and the sustainability of the Council's medium term position.
  - e) That the Council's 2024-25 Budget will include a general council tax increase of 2.99% and a 2.00% increase in the Adult Social Care precept, an overall increase of 4.99% (shown in Section 5 of Appendix 1 of the report), as recommended by the Director of Strategic Finance, and resulting in an increased overall County Council Net Revenue Budget of £527.748m for 2024-25, including budget increases of £116.024m, budget savings of £45.022m, and funding changes of £36.961m as set out in Table 15 of Appendix 1 of the report, and the actions required to deliver the proposed savings, subject to any changes required in line with recommendation 1 above to enable a balanced budget to be proposed. This would result in a budget gap of £45.927m to be addressed for 2025-26, and £132.428m over the life of the Medium Term Financial Strategy.
  - f) The budget proposals set out for 2025-26 to 2027-28, including authorising Executive Directors to take the action required to deliver budget savings for 2025-26 to 2027-28 as appropriate.
  - g) With regard to the future years, that further plans to meet the remaining budget shortfalls in the period 2025-26 to 2027-28 are developed and brought back to Cabinet during 2024-25 as soon as possible and in line with the proposed timetable.

- h) Noting Government's assumptions that local authorities will raise the maximum council tax available to them, and that the final level of council tax for future years is subject to Member decisions annually (informed by any referendum principles defined by the Government), to confirm, or otherwise, the assumptions set out in the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS Table 2 in Appendix 2 of the report) that the Council's budget planning for 2024-25 will include for planning purposes:
- i) general council tax increases of 1.99% from 2025-26;
  - ii) Adult Social Care precept increases of 1.00% 2025-26 and 0.00% from 2026-27); and
  - iii) that if the referendum threshold were increased in the period 2025-26 to 2027-28, or any further discretion were offered to increase the Adult Social Care precept (or similar), the Section 151 Officer would recommend the Council take full advantage of any flexibility in view of the overall financial position.
- i) That the Director of Strategic Finance be authorised to transfer from the County Fund to the Salaries and General Accounts all sums necessary in respect of revenue and capital expenditure provided in the 2024-25 Budget, to make payments, to raise and repay loans, and to invest funds.
- j) To agree the Medium-Term Financial Strategy 2024-28 as set out in Appendix 2 of the report, including the two policy objectives to be achieved:
- i) Revenue: To identify further funding or savings for 2025-26 to 2027-28 to produce a balanced budget in all years 2024-28 in accordance with the timetable set out in the Revenue Budget report (Section 4 Appendix 1 of the report).
  - ii) Capital: To continue to provide a framework for identifying and prioritising capital requirements and proposals to ensure that all capital investment is targeted at meeting the Council's priorities.
- k) The mitigating actions proposed in the equality impact assessments (Appendix 6 of the report).
- l) Note the planned reduction in non-schools earmarked and general reserves of 36.72% over five years, from £175.232m (March 2023) to £110.880m (March 2028) (Section 6 of Appendix 3 of the report);
- m) Note the policy on reserves and provisions in Section 3 of Appendix 3 of the report;
- n) Agree, based on current planning assumptions and risk forecasts set out in Section 5 of Appendix 3 of the report:
- i) for 2024-25, a minimum level of general balances of £26.660m, and
  - ii) a forecast minimum level for planning purposes of
    - 2025-26, £27.910m;
    - 2026-27, £29.160m; and
    - 2027-28, £30.410m.

as part of the consideration of the budget plans for 2024-28 and supporting these budget recommendations;

- o) Agree the use of non-school Earmarked Reserves, as set out in Section 6 of Appendix 3 of the report.

Please see section 4 of the report.

13.10 **Alternative Options**

Please see section 5 of the report.

**14 Reports of the Cabinet Member and Executive Director Delegated Decisions made since the last Cabinet meeting**

- 14.1 Cabinet noted the delegated decisions which had been taken, as set out in the agenda.

The meeting ended at 11:49

**Chair of Cabinet**

**Cabinet**  
**29 January 2024**  
**Public & Local Member Questions**

	<b>Public Question Time</b>
6.1	<p><b>Question from Eleanor Laming</b></p> <p>Pharmacy services have a role in promoting health and addressing inequalities but are operating in an increasingly challenging environment. The growth in online pharmacy services and supply chains can exclude certain groups of residents.  What is Norfolk County Council doing to support the ongoing provision of in person pharmacy services, particularly in rural areas?</p> <p><b>Response from the Cabinet Member for Public Health and Prevention</b></p> <p>Thank you for your question. As Cabinet Member for Public Health and Wellbeing I believe that easy access to pharmacy services is a key part of protecting our population and promoting good health. As you know, Norfolk County Council does not have responsibility for commissioning pharmacy services, this is done by the NHS via the Norfolk and Waveney Integrated Care Board (ICB).</p> <p>Public Health does however undertake a Pharmaceutical Needs Assessment (PNA) and this is published by the Norfolk Health and Wellbeing Board (HWB). The PNA is reviewed quarterly and maps the provision of pharmacy services against the needs of Norfolk's population and is available to be used by the commissioners to help inform their decisions.</p> <p><a href="#">Pharmaceutical Needs Assessment (PNA) updated - Norfolk Insight</a></p>
6.2	<p><b>Question from Tom Lyons</b></p> <p>The uplift should be reviewed up on the basis that it does not adequately support the sustainability of the market. 4.3 highlights that the uplift does not meet all business models, realistically this uplift does not meet any sustainable model without reducing wages of those on the lowest incomes. This is not in a sector that can reduce staffing levels without further risk to quality, which is already at a low - 1.6.2. 5.1 applies an uplift of 7.5% in respect of pay, which is too low considering living wage increases and is flawed to apply the same level of uplifts to LD and OP given higher ratios in LD.</p> <p><b>Response from the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care</b></p> <p>Thank you for your question.</p> <p>The work of the social care market and those that deliver care within it are a priority for the Council and we recognise the importance of this sector to both us as a local authority and to residents across Norfolk. We also acknowledge the significant challenges faced by individual providers due to the economic climate and ongoing workforce challenges and we need to balance this within the finances available to the Council to ensure we can provide all our statutory responsibilities. The recommendations for Cabinet today include increasing the budget by £23.2m to manage increases in fees, building on the £48m budget increase over the previous two years.</p> <p>As set out in the Cabinet paper and detailed within the Market Sustainability Plan, we will continue to push for higher wages for care workers in order to be competitive with other labour markets.</p>

	<p>Our assessment of the fee rates for Older adult care homes and domiciliary care provision (18+), is that the pay rate included within our current (23/24) usual fee and framework rates were set at levels above the National Living Wage (NLW). The % increase relating to the pay uplift (7.5%) would enable providers to still pay a rate that is above NLW.</p> <p>Regarding Learning Disability residential provision, we are currently undertaking a project focusing on re-developing the residential care market for working age adults and a request for data to support this review is due to be sent to Learning Disability (LD) Providers in February 2024. This review will include cost of care activity, and support the design of a strategy for the future of LD residential services for working age adults in Norfolk. We would encourage Providers to take part and help inform this key area of work. It is also important to note that we have prioritised use of the funding via the Market Sustainability Improvement Fund, on Working Age Adults</p> <p>Lastly, providers can contact the Council at any time to discuss any financial concerns.</p>
6.3	<p><b>Question from Nick Taylor</b></p> <p>Is any Cabinet member aware that, if they decide to cut Norfolk's Minimum Income Guarantee to the legally allowable minimum, it will mean that the most vulnerable people in Norfolk, some of whom are already in despair and debt, will have 10% of their income taken away by the council in care charges?</p> <p><b>Response from the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care</b></p> <p>Thank you for your question. This is certainly not a decision that the Council will take lightly, but we do need to consider this as part of managing our finances to ensure that we are in position to meet our statutory duties for all residents of Norfolk not just this year, but into the future. We know that there will be continued financial constraints, and the Council needs to manage the financial challenges from growing demand, greater complexity of need and higher costs brought about by both inflation and the increase in the National Living Wage. We are proposing to start a consultation on the Adult Social Care Charging Policy including the level of the Minimum Income Guarantee for non-residential care next month. We want to encourage as many people as possible to engage with and contribute to this consultation. We will of course be contacting people that will be directly affected, but we also welcome the support of wider groups and organisations to help share this message.</p>

**Cabinet**  
**29 January 2024**  
**Public & Local Member Questions**

	<b>Member Question Time</b>
7.1	<p><b>Question from Cllr Terry Jermy</b>  I note with concern that the number of County Farm tenants has reduced over the past ten years from 130 in 2014 to just 95 in 2023. With the recent changes discussed at the NCC Corporate Select committee which sought views on amending the policy to make tenancies even larger, can the Cabinet Member confirm how many tenancies there are likely to be available in the future?</p> <p><b>Response from the Cabinet Member for Corporate Services and Innovation</b>  The amount of County Farms land (let to tenants) has remained stable over the last ten years at over 16,000 acres. However as was also discussed at the Corporate Select Committee Cllr Jermy refers to, larger tenancies are required for an arable farm to operate economically, given fixed costs such as machinery like tractors and combine harvesters.</p> <p>Over the last ten years, County Farms has adapted the size of tenancies to ensure they provide tenants with economically viable tenancies along with a clear route of progression farms to help people into agriculture and to grow their businesses in a managed way. We will continue to work with our tenants to ensure holdings are viable and will be responsive to their needs, as well as the external environment throughout the life of the County Farms strategy.</p> <p>We will continue to make sure that holdings are viable agricultural businesses in the heart of our rural community – providing high quality, Norfolk food.</p>
7.2	<p><b>Question from Cllr Paul Neale</b>  There are calls for a criminal investigation of the Norfolk and Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust into the 8440 “unexpected” deaths between April 2019 - October 2022 all of whom were either under their care, or had been up to six months before they died. With 45 deaths a week in 2022-23.</p> <p>As this could be the largest deaths crisis in the history of the NHS could Cllr Bill Borrett, who is also chair of the Integrated Care Partnership, share with us what is being done about such horrifying statistics and to end the revolving door of CEO’s to the trust, who invariably claim they will turn the situation around.</p> <p><b>Response from the Cabinet Member for Public Health and Prevention</b>  Thank you for your question. As you are aware Norfolk and Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust (NSFT) is not run by Norfolk County Council or the Norfolk and Waveney Integrated Care Partnership (ICP). The Norfolk Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC), which has County Councillors on it, is looking at this and had it on its Agenda back in September 2023. I hope that you do not mind but I have passed the Chairman of HOSC a copy of your question.</p> <p><b>Second question from Cllr Paul Neale</b></p>

The Minimum Income Guarantee is just £187.13 per week, a meagre amount for those with various complex needs. The recipients of this allowance, and their carers, are really worried that the amount could be reduced in the ever increasing budget cuts review.

To take away the anxiety for those who have a hard enough life already, can the Cabinet member for Finance reassure recipients that no cuts will be made in this year's budget.

**Response from the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care**

Thank you for your question. I would refer you to my answers to the questions raised by Nick Taylor and Cllr Blundell in particular.

Unfortunately, as the budget paper sets out, the financial position facing the Council now and for the medium term and specifically facing Adult Social Services means that we need to look at all aspects of our spending and our income. As a Council we need to ensure that we can deliver our statutory responsibilities to all residents of Norfolk, including continuing to support the 25,000 people that we reach and continue to commission care for them or provide direct payments and for this reason we have proposed that we carry out full consultation about our charging policy.

7.3

**Question from Cllr Ben Price**

Across Norfolk there were 11,058 cases of waste being dumped illegally, compared to 10,761 in 2021-22. Norwich was 28th worst in the country for fly-tipping by population out of 309 local authority areas, with 36.7 recorded incidents per 1,000 people. What assessment has been made to understand how closing all of Norfolk's recycling centres on Wednesdays to save £200,000 a year and introducing booking slots to get rid of waste to save a further annual sum of £200,000 will increase fly-tipping rates in Norwich, and is it really fair to put the costs of this saving onto the district council?

**Response from the Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste**

Fly-tipping is criminal behaviour committed by a small minority of people who flout the law and blight Norfolk's countryside. The majority of fly-tipping is committed by rogue traders offering cheap waste clearance and over 80% of fly-tipped materials in Norfolk could have been taken to one of the County Council's Recycling Centres for free.

Any increase in fly tipping is concerning, although it is noted that the question offers a narrow comparison between one year and another. A more robust assessment of Norfolk's fly-tipping data looking back over the last decade shows no evidence of upward or downward trends in Norfolk. Whether the County Council has been providing newer, bigger and better Recycling Centres or increasing the scope of charges for DIY waste, as it did in 2018, there has been no evidence of associated changes in fly-tipping behaviour.

The real responsibility for fly-tipping belongs to the fly-tippers and elsewhere around the country where booking systems are commonplace, government studies have shown no link to incidents of fly tipping.

**Second question from Cllr Ben Price**

To produce a balanced budget for the 24/25 cycle, the council needs to draw down nearly half of all reserves set aside for adults and children's services. With no firm commitment from the Government or the opposition to increase funding for these areas, we should

expect the same scenario for 25/26, depleting all reserves. Can this council remain a going concern for the 26/27 cycle, while also meeting our statutory obligations?

**Response from the Cabinet Member for Finance**

Thank you for your question. I have been clear that we face difficult decisions in setting the 2024-25 Budget. As a Council, we are also acutely aware of the risks of over reliance on reserves to produce a balanced budget and this is something which we scrutinise closely each year to ensure that our financial plans are robust and sustainable. The judgement on the adequacy of reserves is provided in the 2024-25 Revenue Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy 2024-28 report as part of the Statement on the Adequacy of Provisions and Reserves 2024-28 (Appendix 3 on pages 405 to 432). This sets out in detail the level of reserves and provisions held by the Council both centrally and within individual departments. Table 4 (page 419) lists the department level balances and demonstrates that, whilst we are anticipating a year on year reduction, these are not forecast to be depleted by 2026-27. As part of this statutory report, the Section 151 Officer advises that *“The proposed level of reserves and balances set out in this report is considered to provide a prudent and robust basis for the Revenue Budget 2024-25 and will ensure the Council has adequate financial reserves to manage the delivery of services and the proposed savings in the financial years covered by the associated Medium Term Financial Strategy.”*

Further, as part of the preparation of the Budget, the Director of Strategic Finance is required under Section 25 of the Local Government Act 2003 to report on the robustness of the overall Budget, which includes taking a view of the medium-term position. This is described in Appendix 4 from page 433 of the Cabinet report. It should be noted that there remains a significant degree of uncertainty about the level of funding for Local Government from 2025-26 onwards. Indeed, on 24 January, we have seen that Government has listened to the concerns raised by the sector and confirmed a welcome and significant uplift in social care funding for 2024-25, which will be set out as part of the final Settlement in early February. This serves to highlight the potential for change in future year funding, which is certain to have a bearing on the County Council's overall financial position. The County Council continues to engage with Government, MPs and other stakeholders to campaign for adequate and sustainable funding for Norfolk to maintain delivery of vital services to residents, businesses and visitors. In this context, the Budget setting process each year seeks to take into account the wider environment in which the Council is operating in order to inform plans about reserve usage and the level of savings required. The Council has a strong track record of setting a robust and balanced Budget, and we will, as always, be monitoring closely during 2024-25 to ensure that this is achieved. On this basis I believe it is premature to speculate that we might exhaust our reserves in 2025-26 or indeed a future year, and I would therefore reject the suggestion that the Council is not a going concern.

**7.4 Question from Cllr Catherine Rowett**

According to the Council's 2022 glyphosate policy there are six options for how else to control or manage weeds on the highways and footways in preference to implementing glyphosate-based chemical treatments. Can the cabinet give an update for how many of these options are currently in use for county roads as routine ways of dealing with weeds, and how they are monitoring the effectiveness of their integrated weed management approach as a way of stopping the use of glyphosate, and how the results so far sit with the council's nature recovery and pollinator plans?



**Response from the Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste**

The Council is committed to minimising the use of glyphosate to control the growth of weeds as detailed in the council's Glyphosate Policy. The policy also takes full account of the objectives and strategies set out in both the Council's Pollinator Strategy and Environment Policy.

In terms of highways, the use of glyphosate has been reduced by approximately 50%, as weed spraying has already reduced from 2 treatments to 1 treatment across the network.

The Council will review new methods of weed management as they become available to establish the viability of alternative weed control, although as the highway service require a fully mobile operation, other alternative methods such as thermal treatment or acidic chemical treatment have found to not be viable options.

It is also worth highlighting that the growth of weeds on highways verges is mainly controlled through the grass cutting programme across the network.

**Supplementary question from Cllr Catherine Rowett**

Bee-killing pesticides (neonicotinoids) have controversially been approved by the Conservative Government for use on sugar beet this year. The county council's Pollinator Action Plan, adopted this month, commits the council to work with others to do more to support pollinators. Does the Cabinet Member agree that the decision to allow neonicotinoids on sugar beet in Norfolk directly undermines the council's efforts under the Pollinator Action Plan?

**Response from the Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste**

Neonicotinoid insecticides are used in some pesticides to kill crop-harming insects. The use of most neonicotinoids was severely restricted in 2013 in the EU and UK due to their potential negative impact on bees and other pollinators. By 2020, all but one neonicotinoid was no longer approved for use. However, emergency authorisations are allowed to control pests on sugar beet. Whilst this pesticide is harmful to bees its use is restricted and only licenced by government.

**7.5 Question from Cllr Jamie Osborn**

Residents on Bull Close in Mancroft have been experiencing speeding and antisocial parking. One solution to this would be installation of chicanes to slow traffic, which could also provide valuable space for planting trees, as has been done on Alexandra Road in the Nelson division. Chicanes are a long-term solution that can improve quality of life for residents, but seem not to be being considered by the county council. Can the Cabinet Member tell me when the last time a chicane was installed in a residential street in Norwich?

**Response from the Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport**

Please discuss this in the first instance with your local Highway Engineer as this should be undertaken as part of the duties of a local Member.

**Supplementary question from Cllr Jamie Osborn**

From my experience as a ward councillor, there have been delays to obtaining feasibility studies for transport improvement projects. I was concerned to read Cllr Plant's response

to Cllr Price's question on 10 January stating that he does not know how many feasibility studies remain incomplete, with no overview of the delays. Will the Cabinet Member rationalise this process to ensure there is proper monitoring in place?

**Response from the Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport**

As outlined in my response on 10 January, officers and councillors engage on a regular basis, both formally and informally, on a wide range of transport improvement proposals, some of which lead to further investigation and the production of feasibility studies. I believe this process to be effective without the requirement to increase workloads through the introduction of additional processes. The current processes enable hundreds of highway improvement measures to be installed across Norfolk every year.

7.6

**Question from Cllr Brian Watkins**

Failures in HR systems have been at the forefront of the news cycle over the past fortnight due to the Horizon Scandal. Recently, this council has faced its own struggles with its HR system, MyOracle. Will the Cabinet Member commit to publishing a full report on the system's failings for means of openness and disclosure to staff members of this council?

**Response from the Leader and Cabinet Member for Strategy and Governance**

There was recent local media coverage that made reference to errors in pay for 78 members of staff and the story falsely equated this with the MyOracle system.

The MyOracle system supports the delivery of finance, procurement, HR and payroll activities. Implementation of any software system on this scale creates transformational change which require changes to the way we work to achieve all the benefits a modern IT system brings with it. Our Corporate Select Committee was kept updated during implementation.

Norfolk County Council is a complex organisation with a wide variety of roles and activities that require pay to be calculated in numerous ways. We have over 8000 employees and we also utilise myOracle to provide HR and payroll services to a number of other organisations. In total we pay over 18,000 workers and a total of £42 million each month. We recognise that as we embed the system and the necessary changes to how we work this can result in errors that in some instances have impacted on peoples pay. It is regrettable when anyone's pay is not correct, and we are sorry for the concern this caused any individual affected. We always look to correct any underpayments as a matter of urgency.

Norfolk County Council take all reasonable steps to ensure everyone's pay is correct first time, but it is not unusual for errors to occur in pay calculations for large organisations. Not least because they can arise because of multiple factors including human ones as was the case covered in the local media. Norfolk County Council had to manage such occurrences under our previous system too and the current error rate is lower than with that system. The implementation of myOracle has already brought us many benefits including manager and employee self-service in a number of areas that were not previously possible.

We continue to work hard on improving the ease of use of the system for our managers and employees to help reduce errors further and provide additional benefits to colleagues and the organisation.

7.7	<p><b>Question from Cllr Sharon Blundell</b></p> <p>One of this council's identified priorities when handling social care is to provide adequate support for people 'to live independently, avoid losing independence, and where possible gain it back.' With this in mind, what message does the Cabinet Member have for those who rely on the Adult Social Care service who will be affected by a reduction in the MIG and thus have their independence threatened?</p> <p><b>Response from the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care</b></p> <p>The Council's financial position – and the position of Adult Social Services – is set out clearly in the Cabinet papers today. On any one day in Norfolk, we are supporting in excess of 20,000 people and in order to continue to do the best we possibly can within the resources we have, we need to look at all aspects of our budget. This includes the contributions people make towards the cost of their care – and in doing this all councils consider government advice on the minimum income guarantee. We currently follow the legal minimum level for older people and we are above the legal minimum for people of working age. Through our engagement with some representatives, we do understand the impact of changes for people with disabilities. I have been in contact with the Charging Reference Group and hope to meet with them in the future.</p>
7.8	<p><b>Question from Cllr Tim Adams</b></p> <p>Further budget proposals are due to go out to public consultation, including the controversial decision to reduce the Minimum Income Guarantee. What response from this consultation would it take for this administration to rethink its decision to reduce MIG and to ensure this consultation is not merely a formality?</p> <p><b>Response from the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care</b></p> <p>Thank you for your question. Hearing from people as part of the consultation will be very important and the consultation options and approach are still under discussion, and we are engaging with others to help shape this to make sure that we can hear from as many people as possible. People's views will help shape the information that is provided to Cabinet, including the equality impact assessment. I would also refer you to my answers to the questions raised by Nick Taylor and Cllr Blundell.</p>
7.9	<p><b>Question from Cllr Alexandra Kemp</b></p> <p>Council plans budget savings of £525,000 with "S2425CS005 Inclusion: More primary aged children with SEND travel independently with Travel Independence Travel Across Nation (TITAN) programme" and S2425CS006 Inclusion: Ongoing focus on Home to School Transport maximising travel independence".</p> <p>Council's plans to switch off 2% of streetlights are inconsistent with these aims. It is a safety risk to children of all abilities to wait at bus stops in the dark or walk to school in the dark in winter, a disincentive to reduce the £7.5 million the Council currently spends on Home-to-School Transport.</p> <p>Streetlights are where they are, for safety.</p> <p>Can Cabinet confirm NCC has abandoned plans to switch off streetlights?</p> <p><b>Response from the Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport</b></p>

	<p>The council has some difficult challenges in balancing the budget for the coming financial year and the proposal for switching off a small proportion of the streetlighting asset is one way in which the council can both make a financial saving, a carbon saving, and reduce the amount of light pollution in the environment. In selecting the 2% of the asset, a number of factors will be taken into account including highway safety considerations, which includes pedestrian safety. A number of lights are also likely to be in locations where we would now no longer install street lighting on the network, as over time design standards and expectations change.</p> <p>Therefore, the budget proposal remains and subject to Cabinet approval, will be consulted on so a final decision can be made.</p>
7.10	<p><b>Question from Cllr Colleen Walker</b></p> <p>I asked the Leader at December's Council for the letter she wrote to the Secretary of State about coastal erosion after September's unanimous Council decision. She replied 'I don't have the letter in front of me but we'll see if we can actually find it....'. In fact she hadn't sent one and still hasn't. The December Council decision hasn't been actioned either. In a message to me subsequently she said the first letter wasn't sent because the Secretary of State had changed before it could be. Council was 26th September. Thérèse Coffey was responsible minister until 13th November. Why did the Leader mislead me, council and the people of Hemsby?</p> <p><b>Response from the Leader and Cabinet Member for Strategy and Governance</b></p> <p>I do not agree that I have misled anyone. When responding I was unsure of the status of the letter and was open about this to members and pledged to find out.</p> <p>I made personal contact with you to update you on this situation.</p> <p>This issue will be raised directly with Norfolk MPs as well as the Minister and Secretary of State on 31<sup>st</sup> January and I had preliminary discussions with Steve Barclay when he visited Norfolk on 22<sup>nd</sup> January.</p> <p>This administration continues to proactively engage on this issue.</p>
7.11	<p><b>Question from Cllr Julie Brociek-Coulton</b></p> <p>I've been told on three separate occasions that there is no demand for a carer parking permit scheme and that it will cost too much money. What surveys have been carried out to establish there is no demand, how will these findings be shared with councillors and how much has the Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport calculated that such a scheme would cost?</p> <p><b>Response from the Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport</b></p> <p>It is important to note that there are usually alternative arrangements to enable car parking near to client addresses. The majority of carers park legally in restricted areas using systems already in place to do this, including using visitors permits in residential parking areas.</p> <p>The existing parking agreements across the county already allow health / care workers to purchase daily permits to park in existing resident parking zones at a considerable discount. As such there are no current plans to develop a new scheme or costs available.</p>

7.12	<p><b>Question from Cllr Brenda Jones</b></p> <p>It is clear that any reduction in the value of the Minimum Income Guarantee will have a significantly detrimental impact on Norfolk's residents with disabilities and their families. Will the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care therefore scrap this proposal immediately and remove this recommendation from the budget papers?</p> <p><b>Response from the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care</b></p> <p>Thank you for your question. I would refer you to my answers to the questions raised by Nick Taylor and Cllr Blundell in particular.</p> <p>As the budget paper sets out, the financial position facing the Council now and for the medium term and specifically facing Adult Social Services means that we need to look at all aspects of our spending and our income. As a Council we need to ensure that we can deliver our statutory responsibilities to all residents of Norfolk, including continuing to the support the 25,000 people that we reach and continue to commission care for them or provide direct payments.</p>