

Scrutiny Committee

Date: **Wednesday 22 May 2024**

Time: **10 am**

Venue: **Council Chamber, County Hall, Martineau Lane,
Norwich NR1 2DH**

Membership:

Cllr Daniel Roper (Chair)
Cllr Andrew Proctor (Vice-Chair)
Cllr Carl Annison
Cllr Lesley Bambridge
Cllr Phillip Duigan
Cllr John Fisher
Cllr Tom FitzPatrick
Cllr Keith Kiddie

Cllr Mark Kiddle-Morris
Cllr Brian Long
Cllr Ed Maxfield
Cllr Steve Morphew
Cllr Jamie Osborn

Parent Governor Representatives

Vacancy
Vacancy

Church Representatives

Helen Bates
Paul Dunning

Advice for members of the public:

This meeting will be held in public and in person.

It will be live streamed on YouTube and members of the public may watch remotely by clicking on the following link: [Norfolk County Council YouTube](#)

We also welcome attendance in person, but public seating is limited, so if you wish to attend please indicate in advance by emailing committees@norfolk.gov.uk

Current practice for respiratory infections requests that we still ask everyone attending to maintain good hand and respiratory hygiene and, at times of high prevalence and in busy areas, please consider wearing a face covering.

Please stay at home if you are unwell, have tested positive for COVID 19, have symptoms of a respiratory infection or if you are a close contact of a positive COVID 19 case. This will help make the event safe for attendees and limit the transmission of respiratory infections including COVID-19.

Agenda

1. Apologies

2. Minutes

To confirm the minutes of the meeting held on the 24 April 2024.

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3. Members to Declare any Interests

If you have a **Disclosable Pecuniary Interest** in a matter to be considered at the meeting and that interest is on your Register of Interests you must not speak or vote on the matter.

If you have a **Disclosable Pecuniary Interest** in a matter to be considered at the meeting and that interest is not on your Register of Interests you must declare that interest at the meeting and not speak or vote on the matter

In either case you may remain in the room where the meeting is taking place. If you consider that it would be inappropriate in the circumstances to remain in the room, you may leave the room while the matter is dealt with.

If you do not have a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest you may nevertheless have an **Other Interest** in a matter to be discussed if it affects, to a greater extent than others in your division

- Your wellbeing or financial position, or
- that of your family or close friends
- Any body -
 - Exercising functions of a public nature.
 - Directed to charitable purposes; or
 - One of whose principal purposes includes the influence of public opinion or policy (including any political party or trade union);

Of which you are in a position of general control or management.

If that is the case then you must declare such an interest but can speak and vote on the matter.

4. Public Question Time (15 minutes)

Fifteen minutes for questions from members of the public of which due notice has been given. Please note that all questions must be received by the Committee Team (committees@norfolk.gov.uk) by **5pm on Thursday 16 May 2024**. For guidance on submitting a public question, please visit <https://www.norfolk.gov.uk/what-we-do-and-how-we-work/councillors-meetings-decisions-and-elections/committees-agendas-and-recent-decisions/ask-a-question-to-a-committee>

5. **Local Member Issues/Questions**
Fifteen minutes for local member to raise issues of concern of which due notice has been given. Please note that all questions must be received by the Committee Team (committees@norfolk.gov.uk) by **5pm on Thursday 16 May 2024.**
6. **To note that the deadline for calling-in matters, from the Cabinet meeting held on Wednesday 8 May 2024 was 4pm on Wednesday 15 May 2024**
7. **Norwich to Tilbury Overhead Power Line Proposal – Statutory Consultation by National Grid** **Page 12**
Report from the Director of Growth and Investment
8. **Strategic and Financial Planning 2025-26** **Page 32**
Report from the Director of Strategic Finance
9. **Performance Review Panels – Quarterly Update** **Page 63**
Report from the Interim Executive Director for Adult Social Services and the Executive Director for Children’s Services.
10. **Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme** **Page 79**

Tom McCabe
Chief Executive
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Date Agenda Published: 14 May 2024



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Norfolk County Council

Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the Meeting Held on 24 April 2024
at 10am at County Hall Norwich

Present:

Cllr Steve Morphew (Chair)
Cllr Daniel Elmer (Vice-Chair)
Cllr Lesley Bambridge
Cllr Phillip Duigan
Cllr John Fisher
Cllr Tom FitzPatrick
Cllr Keith Kiddie
Cllr Mark Kiddle-Morris
Cllr Brian Long
Cllr Brian Watkins

Substitute Members Present:

Cllr Will Richmond for Cllr Carl Annison

Also Present:

Debbie Bartlett	Interim Executive Director for Adult Social Care
Kat Hulatt	Director of Legal Services and Monitoring Officer
Peter Randall	Democratic Support and Scrutiny Manager
Cllr Alison Thomas	Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care
Laine Tisdall	Committee Officer

1. Apologies for Absence

1.1 Apologies were received from Cllr Carl Annison (substituted by Cllr Will Richmond), Cllr Ed Maxfield and Paul Dunning. Cllr Jamie Osborn was also absent.

2. Minutes

2.1 The minutes of the previous meeting held on the 20 March 2024 were confirmed as an accurate record and signed by the Chair.

3. Declarations of Interest

3.1 Cllr Lesley Bambridge declared a non-pecuniary interest, as she was currently a trustee of West Norfolk Carers.

4. Public Question Time

4.1 No public questions were received

5. Local Member Issues/Questions

5.1 One Local Member question was received, from Cllr Alexandra Kemp. This read as follows:

“County's Promoting Independence Strategy on today's Agenda, provides feedback, from Carers, that they need more support around adaptable, flexible, and reliable respite care. The shortage of such respite care in West Norfolk has put older carers' health and wellbeing at risk in Clenchwarton. How is County going to address this market failure?”

5.2 As the question related to Item 7 on the agenda, the Chair asked the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care to provide an answer.

5.3 The Cabinet Member commented there was a number of ways that the Adult Social Care department could provide support to carers, such as bed-based respite care and bookable beds which were commissioned from Norse Care. In addition, the Shared Life Service also provided an alternative respite care service, along with day and specialist services across Norfolk. The Cabinet Member implored Local Members to report any issues affecting localities in their division to the Adult Social Care team, who would then investigate further.

5.4 The Chair made a point of order to clarify that while the Committee welcomed questions from Local Members, any such questions should be answerable by the Scrutiny Committee directly, rather than using the process as a conduit to pass questions to Cabinet Members.

6. Call In

6.1 The Committee noted that there were no call-in items at this meeting from the Cabinet meeting held on the 8 April 2024.

7. Adult Social Services Promoting Independence Five Year Strategy

7.1 The Committee received the annexed report (7).

7.2 The Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care introduced the report, which provided Committee Members with a copy of the Cabinet paper and associated documents for the Adult Social Services Promoting Independence Five Year Strategy. The policy formed part of the Norfolk County Council Policy Framework, requiring a scrutiny process to take place in accordance with part 11B of the Norfolk County Council constitution.

- 7.3 Adult Social Care had worked on its Promoting Independence ambition for a number of years. The strategy was being updated to ensure it still met and reflected the needs of residents in Norfolk. It was important to engage with those who use Adult Social Care services, to understand what was working and what required improvement. Communication was key to the success of the strategy. It was acknowledged that the Adult Social Care website required improvements, particularly to assist customers who were not particularly confident with IT.
- 7.4 The Cabinet Member acknowledged there was further work to be done to ensure the success of the Promoting Independence strategy. It was therefore important to scrutinise the performance of Adult Social Care, which was where the use of Vital Signs measures and the Performance Review Panels came into play, to assess and challenge the current status of the department's efforts.
- 7.5 An officer commented that it was a priority for the department to understand what exactly independence meant to different people. To this end, there had been a series of drop-in centres and library sessions across Norfolk to meet the public. Special events were organised across the county to engage with different groups in a variety of settings. Adult Social Care also liaised with the Norfolk Community Foundation to develop links with grassroots communities in rural areas.
- 7.6 The following points were discussed and noted:
- A Committee Member requested clarification regarding engagement with stakeholders, particularly in rural areas of Norfolk. An officer stated that while it was not possible to reach every single community in Norfolk, the department attempted to reach out to grassroots organisations as much as possible. At present the consultation had reached all but five postcodes in Norfolk, with arrangements being made to cover the outliers. It was important that the connections with communities were maintained so that future engagement could take place. The team were investigating more extensive engagement with parish and town councils as a possible future way forward. The Committee Member commented this was a positive level of engagement and suggested using targeted newsletters as a way of reaching rural communities, due to the decline of local newspapers. The Cabinet Member noted that she had led online engagement sessions with stakeholders and requested that Local Members also spread the message in their divisions.
 - A Committee Member asked if any trends in public feedback had been identified and what changes people wished to see from the department compared to 2019. An officer stated that while there were no major surprises in the feedback, communication was a noticeable trend. The start of a person's communication with Adult Social Care tended to be at the beginning of a crisis, meaning it was a challenge to ensure the correct information was provided and made available over the lifespan of the case. An information strategy was being considered, as it was important to prepare people for what might happen later in their lives. Respondents also emphasised the role of carers. The Council had made efforts to improve the visibility of carers over the past five years through strategies, with engagement work being conducted with carers groups.

- A Committee Member queried if investment in technological care solutions would prove beneficial to the department by enabling additional resources to be allocated towards people with more complex needs. An officer stated that Adult Social Care had always traditionally been seen as a person to person service. There was potentially a significant opportunity for technology to take over back office processes and therefore free up human resources for more public-facing services. With the advent of AI technology, there was also the potential to predict life events that might affect people later in their lives. The officer stressed that technology would not replace the fundamental principles of social work but would help provide assistance in the future.
- A Committee Member expressed concern that carers were having difficulty coping with the level of work in the sector at present. A recent study had highlighted that there would be 25% more people living with dementia by 2030, which would place additional strain on resources. The Committee Member asked if Adult Social Care had a strategy in place to cope with an increase in demand. An officer stated that this was an issue facing the public sector nationwide. The focus of the department was to ensure that patients were able to stay in familiar surroundings for as long as possible. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic there was a focus on dementia-friendly communities, which could be an option to be revisited in the future. It was also important to reduce the burden on carers, which was where technology could play a role. The Cabinet Member commented that caring for the carer in dementia cases was an important aim for Adult Social Care, citing personal experience. Using the lived experience of carers could be utilised to better meet the needs of people.
- A Committee Member mentioned that the strategy was to be measured against national standards, but that there did not appear to be any figures or targets in the report. The Cabinet Member stated that the measures were constantly updated by government and were therefore omitted from the document as they would be immediately out of date, requiring the strategy to be continually refreshed. Adult Social Care worked under a national framework, with the measures being used as an indicator of performance. The Performance Review Panel regularly reviewed and scrutinised the Vital Signs measures, which were also reported to Cabinet on a quarterly basis.
- The Chair noted that the report referenced that Adult Social Care had not been able to keep pace with the increase in people asking for support, with subsequent increases in waiting lists, and requested clarification as to how the strategy would mitigate these issues. An officer stated that the department had seen a reduction in the size of waiting lists by approximately 40%. The People and Communities Select Committee was regularly updated on waiting lists. In addition, the department had seen a strong improvement in dealing with the most urgent cases swiftly through triaging. The Cabinet Member commented that it was important to understand the exact reasons why people were on the waiting list and for what conditions. A project termed “Waiting Well” was in place with the department’s NHS partners to probe waiting lists for orthopaedic surgery and to understand the status of patients.

- The Chair commented that demographic change was a huge challenge to meet and asked how Adult Social Care would meet increased demand given the current level of vacancies in the social work sector. An officer acknowledged that recruitment was a national issue affecting all local authorities; however this was a challenge the department was actively working toward mitigating. The interim care list previously had over 800 patients waiting for attention. This had now been reduced to just 42 patients through improvements in the availability of care. The department had adapted its recruitment processes to target areas where there were large number of vacancies, while there had been significant investment towards in-house apprenticeships, which would mean the department would benefit from a home-grown work force in the future. Improving the image of social care was a challenge which would be met through constant, vigilant efforts from Adult Social Care. The Chair noted that it would be prudent for the strategy to look at workforce recruitment and retention.
- The Chair asked how ratings from the Care Quality Commission (CQC) slotted into the strategy. An officer stated the strategy was primarily focused on ensuring the best outcomes for people. Achieving this involved a focus on care quality improvements and ensuring that Adult Social Care had the correct mix of skills in its workforce to deliver its services in the future. Work was underway to model demand for services over the next few years, given recruitment rates and demographic change in Norfolk. The team constantly considered these factors.
- A Committee Member expressed concern regarding the accessibility of the Adult Social Care website, as it appeared to redirect people to social services. As this could cause issues during emergency situations, the Committee Member asked if printed sources of information were available at hospitals and surgeries. An officer acknowledged that public engagement had highlighted that navigating the website was not easy, which was now a high-priority item to resolve on the Adult Social Care agenda. The team read and engaged with complaints, which illustrated challenges with communication at all levels, including that information sometimes given by health professionals was often then contradicted by the department. An information strategy was required to tackle this challenge, which would involve liaising with partners in the public and private sector.
- A Committee Member explained that through her role as a governor at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital (QEH) in King's Lynn, she had first-hand experience with the discharge and reablement process for patients. There was often a number of patients at any one time in hospital who were ready to be discharged but due to delays this could not happen. The QEH now had a Service Level Agreement with a local charity in West Norfolk to assist with the discharge process. The Committee Member asked if this arrangement was being replicated at other hospitals across Norfolk. An officer stated the department currently conducted an extensive range of work with its NHS partners to support and augment discharge arrangements. Norfolk First Support also provided assistance where necessary, particularly where houses needed to be adapted before reablement, while voluntary sector groups liaised with the Norfolk Integrated Care Board to improve the situation.

- A Committee Member queried how the Adult Social Care team were working with the University of East Anglia (UEA) and education providers to attract graduates towards filling social work vacancies. An officer confirmed there was ongoing engagement with educational facilities to make social work an attractive proposition for those in further education. The apprenticeship scheme was proving to be a success with a high degree of retention.
- A Committee Member asked how successful the Adult Social Care team had been over the past five years in increasing the range of reablement opportunities, along with their plans for the next five year term. An officer stated that connecting communities work over the past year had seen a huge improvement in the numbers of people that Norfolk First Support were reaching, along with the outcomes achieved. As a result of these improvements, less ongoing care was required due to reablement. In 2019 there were significant vacancies within Norfolk First Support. The team had focussed over the past five years to fill vacancies and drive retention within the sector. Every postcode in Norfolk was reached by NFS. The main challenge facing Adult Social Care was to ensure the right balance of support for people who wanted to remain in their communities as opposed to those who needed more specialised care.
- The Chair queried if review dates were specified, as it appeared the strategy was due to expire in 2029 without any reviews beforehand. An officer stated that review dates had not been stipulated; however there were annual planning processes built into the strategy, which in practice could be used as a review.

7.7 The Scrutiny Committee **RESOLVED** the following:

1. To **CONSIDER** the proposed Promoting Independence Five Year Strategy, providing comments and recommendations where appropriate.
2. To **ASK** officers to produce a report to the Leader and Cabinet Member on behalf of the committee in accordance with section 11b of the Norfolk County Council Constitution (Budget and Policy Framework Procedure Rules), providing feedback and recommendations where appropriate.

8. **Quarterly Update on Children’s and Adult Social Care Performance Review Panels.**

8.1 As both the Deputy Cabinet Members for Adult Social Care and Children’s Services had submitted apologies, the Chair proposed that this item be deferred to the next meeting of the Scrutiny Committee. This was **APPROVED** by the Committee.

9. **Update from the Chair of the Norfolk Countywide Community Safety Partnership Scrutiny Sub Panel (NCCSPSSP)**

9.1 The Scrutiny Committee received the annexed report (9).

9.2 Cllr Mark Kiddle-Morris, in his capacity as Chair of the NCCSPSSP, introduced the report, which gave an update of the activities of the Scrutiny Sub Panel.

9.3 The new Serious Violence Duty imposed by the government on Community Safety Partnerships was discussed by the Panel at their February meeting. In addition, the Panel considered and commented on Domestic Violence Change Champions. These were officials who functioned as a point of contact for those affected by domestic violence, often signposting people towards the Norfolk Integrated Domestic Abuse Service (NIDAS).

9.4 Panel Members had expressed concern regarding the new scrutiny arrangements for the NCCSPSSP, as it was believed expertise from the Police and Crime Panel did not transfer across to the Scrutiny Sub Panel. Officers confirmed the arrangements would be reviewed, with the likelihood being that meetings of both panels would be scheduled on the same day going forward. The Chair commented that the changes were necessitated by a number of inordinate meetings during 2023.

9.5 The following point was discussed and noted:

- A Committee Member requested clarification regarding the Panel recommending the Community Safety Partnership looking into training for parents on the signs of risk for children's involvement in County Lines and serious violence. The Chair of the NCCSPSSP confirmed that as the recommendation had been made, this was hopefully going to proceed.

9.6 The Scrutiny Committee **RESOLVED** the following:

1. To **CONSIDER** the progress being made by the Scrutiny Sub Panel and what recommendations (if any) it might make for its future work.
2. To **CONSIDER** the further comments on the future arrangements for scrutiny of the Norfolk Countywide Community Safety Partnership and amendments to the Terms of Reference.

10. Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme

10.1. The Scrutiny Committee received the report which set out the current forward work plan for the Committee.

10.2 The Scrutiny Committee **RESOLVED** to **NOTE** the current forward work programme.

11. Closing Statement by Chair of the Scrutiny Committee

- 11.1 With the 2023/24 municipal year drawing to a close, the Chair thanked officers and Committee Members for all their work and support during his five year tenure as Chair of the Scrutiny Committee.
- 11.2 Committee Members proposed a vote of thanks to the Chair for his work as Chair of the Scrutiny Committee.

The meeting concluded at 11:14

**Cllr Steve Morphew, Chair
Scrutiny Committee**



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Scrutiny Committee

Item No: 7

Report Title: Norwich to Tilbury Overhead Power Line Proposal – Statutory Consultation by National Grid

Date of Meeting: 22 May 2024

Responsible Cabinet Member: Cllr Graham Plant (Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure & Transport)

Responsible Director: Name and Job Title – Chris Starkie Director of Growth and Investment

Executive Summary

National Grid have published their Preliminary Environmental Information Report (PEIR) for consultation relating to their proposed Norwich to Tilbury electricity transmission project. The project comprises 184 km (114 miles) 400kV overhead power-line between Norwich Main and Tilbury in Essex. Approximately 30km (18 miles) of the transmission line sits within Norfolk with a 2 km (1.2 miles) section of undergrounding proposed across the River Waveney to the West of Diss. The Project will be taken forward as a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP) under the 2008 Planning Act and will be determined Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero. The County Council has previously responded to National Grid on two separate non-statutory consultations in June 2022 and September 2023; and has sought on both occasions an offshore alternative; or significant undergrounding if an onshore route is pursued.

The County Council continues to recognise the need to add capacity to the existing electricity transmission network and understands that the project would assist in meeting the UK's energy ambition of connecting 50GW of offshore wind by 2030; and meeting the Government's net zero target by 2050.

While there have been some improvements to the proposed route since the previous consultations, there are wider strategic concerns that the findings of a recent Study (March 2024) undertaken by the Electricity Systems Operator (ESO) relating to a series of alternative transmission options across East Anglia have not been adequately considered by National Grid. There are also concerns regarding the timing of the proposal in light of Independent Review commissioned by Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex County Councils suggesting that the upgrading of the network is not needed until 2035 rather than 2030 date suggested by National Grid.

Notwithstanding these strategic concerns, if a land-based option continues to be pursued by National Grid then there needs to be:

- (a) further undergrounding along the route, particularly in the Diss area, where a recent Landscape Assessment Study commissioned by Norfolk and Suffolk County Councils has identified the importance of the River Waveney and quality of the local landscape;
- (b) further consideration made by National Grid for delivering power to Norfolk to support planned housing and employment growth; and
- (c) Suitable compensation arrangements will be needed for those residents and business affected by this proposal;

Given the scale of the proposal; the potential alternative options; and the questions around the timing when the upgrades are needed, National Grid should pause their current proposal and consider alternative options in consultation with the ESO and the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero.

Recommendations:

The Committee agree to:

- 1. Note the status of the Norwich to Tilbury Project and the proposed strategic comments which will be reported to the County Council's Planning and Highways Delegations Committee on 10 June 2024;**
- 2. Endorsing the comments in this Report and forwarding any further strategic comments to the above Committee; and**
- 3. Recognise that detailed technical matters are still being considered as part of the comprehensive assessment by officers of the PEIR.**

1. Background and Purpose

- 1.1 The purpose of this Report is to inform Scrutiny Committee of the above National Grid Statutory Consultation and the key strategic issues arising, which will be reported to the Planning and Highways Delegations (P&HD) Committee (10 June 2024). At this stage officers are still assessing the detailed Preliminary Environmental Information Report (PEIR), which forms part of the Statutory S42 Consultation under the 2008 Planning Act.

1.2 The project (see below) broadly comprises a new 400kV overhead power line between Norwich Main and Tilbury substation in Essex. Members will recall that P&HD committee responded to the Non-statutory consultation in September last year ([CMIS > Calendar of Meetings](#)) and urged both National Grid and the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ) to consider:

- Further investigation into the offshore option – involving an offshore transmission network capable of delivering power direct from source to where it is most needed;
- Under-grounding option – in the event that the offshore solution is not deliverable / feasible within the timescales required; every effort must be made to bury the proposed cables; and
- Upgrading where possible the existing over-head power lines to increase capacity. It is understood, however, that National Grid have already started upgrading the existing overhead line.

1.3 The Committee also sought reassurance from National Grid that in the event of an onshore solution being deemed necessary, then there needs to be accompanying investment in the transmission network in Norfolk to deliver benefits of green energy for the County. In addition the Committee asked National Grid to consider route realignment and undergrounding around Diss and the Waveney Valley to lessen the impact on local communities.

Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects

1.4 Given the scale of the project (see Section 2 below) it will be taken forward as a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP) under the 2008 Planning Act and will be determined by the Secretary of State (SoS) for Energy Security and Net Zero. This is a statutory pre-application consultation by National Grid under Section 42 of the above Act. It is important to note that the County Council as a statutory consultee will also have an opportunity to formally comment and make relevant representations on the submitted Development Consent Order (DCO) application (under Section 56 of the above Act), which is expected in Spring 2025.

1.5 The above consultation rounds will be followed by a six-month Public Examination period led by an Examining Authority (ExA) who are appointed by the Planning Inspectorate (PINS). During this period the County Council will have an opportunity to comment and submit its Local Impact Report (LIR). There will also be opportunities to submit Statements of Common Ground (SoCG) with the applicant. It is likely that once National Grid have submitted their DCO, it will take a minimum of 18 months before a final decision is made by the Secretary of State.

Context and National Policy

1.6 This project is coming forward as part of National Grid's: "the Great Grid Upgrade - making our electricity fit for the future"; and includes two other projects in Norfolk being taken forward under separate Development Consent Order (DCO) applications by National Grid:

(a) Grimsby (Lincolnshire) to Walpole (West Norfolk) (**G2W**) – proposed new 400kV overhead line and new Substations (one proposed in Walpole); and

(b) East Green Links 3 and 4 (**EGL3&4**) – New subsea High Voltage Direct Current (HVDC) from Scotland and comprising two convertor stations proposed in Walpole area.

County Council's Climate Strategy

1.7 The County Council's Climate Strategy (2023) recognises that the existing energy grid and distribution infrastructure requires considerable investment to adapt to future energy demands and emerging technologies. It indicates that "Investment to improve the network infrastructure is therefore fundamental to meeting decarbonisation aims as a county, and supporting the community itself as it transitions to an electrified future."

1.8 The Strategy also recognises that: "...there are pressures for new onshore transmission infrastructure associated with the offshore wind energy sector making landfall and grid connection in Norfolk. Consideration of alternatives to new overhead transmission lines needs to be taken forward for dealing with offshore wind energy, such as an offshore transmission network; and/or opportunities for burying new transmission lines to reduce visual impacts across the county".

Full Council Motion 7 May 2024

1.9 At Full Council on 7 May 2024, the County Council agreed a Motion relating to the above Norwich to Tilbury proposal and this is set out in the Appendix to this report.

2. Proposal and Overview

2.1 The Project broadly comprises:

- Building a new 400 kV overhead power line between Norwich and Tilbury (Essex) some 184 km (114 miles) – which would involve a 30 km (18 miles) overhead line and pylons (approximately 89 towers) in Norfolk (see Maps 1-6 in the Appendix);

- Work at existing substations at Norwich Main; Bramford (Suffolk); and Tilbury (Essex); and
 - A new substation in Tendring (Essex).
- 2.2 The key differences compared to the previous consultation (Summer 2023) are:
- The proposed undergrounding (2km / 1.2 miles) of part of the route to the west of Diss under the River Waveney;
 - A series of alignment changes, including at:
 - (a) Norwich Main - to avoid a battery storage facility;
 - (b) Between Swainsthorpe and Mulbarton – to avoid a solar farm and archaeological site; and
 - (c) Aslacton – to reduce effects on woodland.
- 2.3 The project will also comprise other ancillary works required to facilitate construction and operation; and will include: (a) temporary work compounds for construction; and (b) land required for mitigation/compensation purposes and/or enhanced environment e.g. Biodiversity Net Gain.
- 2.4 The proposed overhead power lines will be supported by steel lattice pylons with a maximum tower height of 45-50m at intervals of 350-400m. The proposed alignment of the overhead lines is shown in Appendix 1 (See Maps 1 - 6). It is understood that the works required at Norwich Substation will be subject to a separate planning application submitted under the Town and Country Planning Act and will be determined by the Local Planning Authority (South Norfolk District Council).
- 2.5 The need for the project arises from additional demands placed on the network from the connection of offshore wind farms and other proposed energy projects such as the recently consented Sizewell C. The project would assist in:
- Meeting the Government’s energy ambition of delivering up to 50 GW of offshore wind by 2030;
 - Meeting the Government’s objectives of Net Zero by 2050; and
 - Decarbonising the energy transmission system.

3. Impact of the Proposal – Initial Assessment and Key Strategic Comments

3.1 Set out below are key strategic issues arising from the above consultation based on the current officer assessment. Detailed technical matters relating to the County Council's statutory functions as: Highway Authority; Lead Local Flood Authority; Minerals and Waste Planning Authority; and Public Health Authority are still be considered by officers; alongside the potential economic impacts. The environmental impacts are also being assessed by officers particularly in relation to: landscape; ecology; arboriculture; biodiversity net gain; and historic environment. These detailed comments will be appended to the Report going to the Planning and Highways Delegations Committee (June 2024).

(a) Overarching Strategic Considerations

3.2 The need for upgrading the electricity transmission network at both the national and local level is recognised and this proposal would assist in meeting the Government's objectives on net zero and delivering offshore wind power. However, since previously commenting on the earlier consultation rounds by National Grid there has been the publications of two new Reports considering alternative electricity transmission options:

(a) An Independent Review of the Strategic Options undertaken by Hiorns Smart Energy Networks (September 2023); and

(b) The Electricity Systems Operator (ESO) East Anglia Network Study (March 2024). NB The ESO's role is to operate the electricity transmission system and work in partnership with Government, the energy regulator (Ofgem), industry and consumers to accelerate the transition away from fossil fuels into new energy technologies. They are independent of National Grid and other transmission owners (e.g. UKPN).

3.3 The Hiorns' Report commissioned by Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex County Councils concluded that while there is a demonstrable need for additional capacity to the network arising from new offshore wind generation and low carbon energy generation in the region (Sizewell C), it:

(a) Does not support the current delivery timetable of 2030 outlined by National Grid; and instead suggests additional capacity would not be needed until 2035+; and

(b) Suggests that the costs of the offshore alternative/s have been over-estimated by National Grid.

The Report does, however, conclude that the most economical option at present for meeting the need for future transmission capacity is onshore overhead lines and pylons.

3.4 The ESO Study has considered a number of configurations options on how to deliver the transmission reinforcement needed across East Anglia; and explored whether there are better ways to connect offshore wind in Norfolk; Suffolk; and Essex. The Study looked at 10 options ranging from:

- Predominantly offshore;
- Onshore Overhead Lines;
- Onshore HVDC buried cables; and
- Hybrid onshore and offshore

3.5 National Grid have considered both these studies and concluded that their proposal is the most efficient and economical; and can be delivered by 2030. However, given the scale of the proposal; the potential alternative options; and the questions around the timing when the upgrades are needed, there is a compelling argument that the current project should be paused and further consideration be given by National Grid to alternative options in consultation with the ESO and the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero.

(b) Delivering Benefits and Compensation for Norfolk

3.7 The County Council had previously sought assurances from National Grid that in the event of an onshore option being taken forward, there needed to be demonstrable benefits for Norfolk in terms of providing power to communities and business to support planned growth. As currently set out, the Project would see energy passing through the County with none of the energy being used in Norfolk.

3.8 As such the County Council's previous comments should be maintained and National Grid should engage with both Norfolk County Council and UK Power Networks as part of the above project to consider what opportunities there are to provide power to Norfolk; and what additional infrastructure may be needed to secure such benefits.

It is felt that this should be undertaken in conjunction with the County Council's preparation of an Energy Plan; and that National Grid should contribute towards the cost of such a Plan, particularly given that other major National Grid Projects are coming forward in the West of the County.

3.9 In addition National Grid will need to address compensation for those residents and businesses adversely affected by the proposed project either during or after construction. It is understood that Government is still considering the wider compensation and community benefits arrangement needed to address the upgrading of the transmission network at a national level. With regard to the potential impact on local Airfields; and any potential safety issues arising this must be a matter for the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) and the respective operators. The County Council would expect all safety considerations to have been taken into account by National Grid in consultation with the CAA.

(c) Minimising the Impact on Diss and the Waveney Valley

3.10 Since the previous consultation round (2023) when the County Council sought the realignment and/or undergrounding of the overhead line across the River Waveney, National Grid have now indicated they are prepared to underground a 2 km section under the River to the West of Diss (see Map 6).

3.11 The County Council along with Suffolk County Council have commissioned a Landscape Assessment Study of the Waveney Valley (2023). The Study recognises that while the area sits outside any national designations, it nevertheless demonstrates many of special qualities in terms of, *for example*:

- Presence of medieval churches; windmills and watermills;
- Unspoilt rural tranquillity – creating a visually appealing landscape; and
- Exhibits a particular uniqueness such as the wooded upper reaches west of Diss.

3.12 It concludes that the Waveney Valley expresses many of the special qualities of a “valued landscape”. This supports the County Council’s previous comments, which recognised the landscape importance of the area; as well as an area of public recreation; and having a major visitor attraction at Bressingham Steam Museum and Gardens.

3.13 While the County Council welcomes the commitment by National Grid to underground across the Waveney Valley, the length of undergrounding (just 2km / 1.2 miles) should be extended along the western edge of Diss by around 4 – 6 km (2.5 – 3.7 miles) to avoid impact on the local landscape and on local communities in both Diss, Roydon and Bressingham. The Landscape Assessment work carried out for Norfolk and Suffolk County Councils supports protecting this “valued landscape”.

- 3.14 Extended undergrounding in this area would be consistent with updated advice contained in National Policy Statement EN-5 (2024) covering Electricity Networks Infrastructure, which accepts that undergrounding may be required outside designated area. Further detailed landscape and environmental comments will be picked up in the report to P&HD Committee (June 2024).

4. Evidence and Reasons for Decision

- 4.1 Responding to this statutory consultation will enable the County Council's strategic and technical comments on the proposed Norwich to Tilbury project to be considered by National Grid before they formally submit their DCO application in Spring 2025. The County Council will have the opportunity to respond and make relevant representations when National Grid formally submit their DCO application. The above comments alongside any further representations made by the County Council will ultimately feed into a Public Examination overseen by the Examining Authority (ExA) appointed by the Planning Inspectorate. The final decision on this proposal will be made by the Secretary of State following recommendation from the ExA.
- 4.2 The County Council's engagement now in the process will help to bring forward the best scheme supporting the County Council's clean growth ambitions and Climate Strategy in line with the Government's net zero targets.

5. Alternative Options

- 5.1 The County Council could choose not to respond to this statutory consultation, but this would not enable the County Council's strategic and technical comments on National Grid's project to be considered and taken into account in the decision-making process

6. Financial Implications

- 6.1 Officers have engaged with the applicant at the technical scoping stage; attending steering group and topic-based meetings and provided technical advice and information in respect of the County Council's statutory responsibilities. The County Council is in discussion with the applicant with regard to the preparation of a Planning Performance Agreement (PPA), which would allow for the cost recovery of officer time spent on this project.
- 6.2 To date the County Council has been able to charge for officer time spent engaging with National Grid ahead of any formal PPA being signed. The applicant has provided assurances, through a letter of intent, that reasonable staff time will be paid for.

7. Resource Implications

7.1 Staff: Staff resources for dealing with this project is being met from existing resources; and funding from National Grid as set out above.

7.2 Property:

There are no immediate implications for the County Council as landowner.

7.3 IT: None identified

8. Other Implications

8.1 Legal Implications:

This is a response to a formal statutory consultation on a proposal by National Grid, which if progressed would be determined under the 2008 Planning Act by the Secretary State for Energy Security and Net Zero. While there are no legal implications at this stage to the County Council responding to this consultation, it's continuing involvement and discussion with National Grid will ensure the County Council's statutory roles and responsibilities are met.

8.2 Human Rights Implications: None identified.

8.3 Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) (this must be included):

The Council's Planning functions are subject to equality impact assessments. A detailed equality impact assessment has not been carried out as this report is responding to a consultation, however, consideration has been given to equality issues. The recommended comments relate to the County Council's role as a statutory consultee. This report and the comments set out in the report aim to ensure that any new overhead lines will have minimal impact on communities, while supporting the County Council's own clean growth ambitions and Climate Strategy in line with the Government's Energy Security Strategy .

8.4 Data Protection Impact Assessments (DPIA): None identified.

8.5 Health and Safety implications (where appropriate): The wider Public Health implications of this proposal are currently being assessed by officers and will be reported to P&HD Committee along with the County Council's detailed technical comments.

8.6 Sustainability implications (where appropriate):

These are considered in the main text of the Report.

8.7 Any Other Implications: None identified.

9. Risk Implications / Assessment

- 9.1 The County Council is a statutory consultee on any Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project within or adjacent to Norfolk; and the final decision will be determined by the Secretary of State. Following this statutory Section 42 consultation there will be further opportunity for the County Council to respond to this proposal at the formal 56 (submission stage) under Section 56 of the Planning Act 2008.
- 9.2 The County Council will also be invited to submit a Local Impact Report later in the DCO process setting out detailed comments on the proposal as it affects the County Council.

10. Select Committee Comments

- 10.1 Given the very tight timetable to respond to NSIPs, and to this consultation, there has not been the opportunity to take this consultation through the Select Committee process.
- 10.2 Local Member have been consulted and their comments will be fed back to P&HD Committee.

11. Recommendations

The Committee agree to:

1. **Note the status of the Norwich to Tilbury Project and the proposed strategic comments which will be reported to the County Council's Planning and Highways Delegations Committee on 10 June 2024;**
2. **Endorsing the comments in this Report and forwarding any further strategic comments to the above Committee; and**
3. **Recognise that detailed technical matters are still being considered as part of the comprehensive assessment by officers of the PEIR.**

12. Background Papers

- 12.1 Norwich to Tilbury – Preliminary Environmental Information Report (PEIR)
National Grid web-page: www.nationalgrid.com/norwich-to-tilbury
- 12.2 National Grid Web-page on the overhaul of the electricity grid:
<https://www.nationalgrid.com/the-great-grid-upgrade>
- 12.3 Planning and Highways Delegations Committee Report September 2023: [CMIS > Calendar of Meetings](#)

- 12.4 Grimsby to Walpole Grimsby to Walpole:
<https://www.nationalgrid.com/electricity-transmission/network-and-infrastructure/infrastructure-projects/grimsby-to-walpole>:
- 12.5 East Green Links 3 and 4 : <https://www.nationalgrid.com/electricity-transmission/network-and-infrastructure/infrastructure-projects/eastern-green-link-3-and-4>.
- 12.6 Overarching National Policy Statement for Energy (EN-1);
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/overarching-national-policy-statement-for-energy-en-1>
- 12.7 National Policy Statement for Electricity networks infrastructure (EN-5):
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-policy-statement-for-electricity-networks-infrastructure-en-5>
- 12.8 Electricity Systems Operator (ESO) East Anglia Network Study (March 2024):
[East Anglia study | ESO \(nationalgrideso.com\)](#)
- 12.9 British Energy Security Strategy:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/british-energy-security-strategy/british-energy-security-strategy>
- 12.10 Valued Landscape Assessment – Waveney Valley March 2024:
<https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/council-news/waveney-valley-a-valued-landscape-according-to-new-study>
- 12.11 East Anglia Transmission Network Reinforcements – Hiorns Smart Energy Networks: [Norwich to Tilbury - Suffolk County Council](#)

Officer Contact

If you have any questions about matters contained within this paper, please get in touch with:

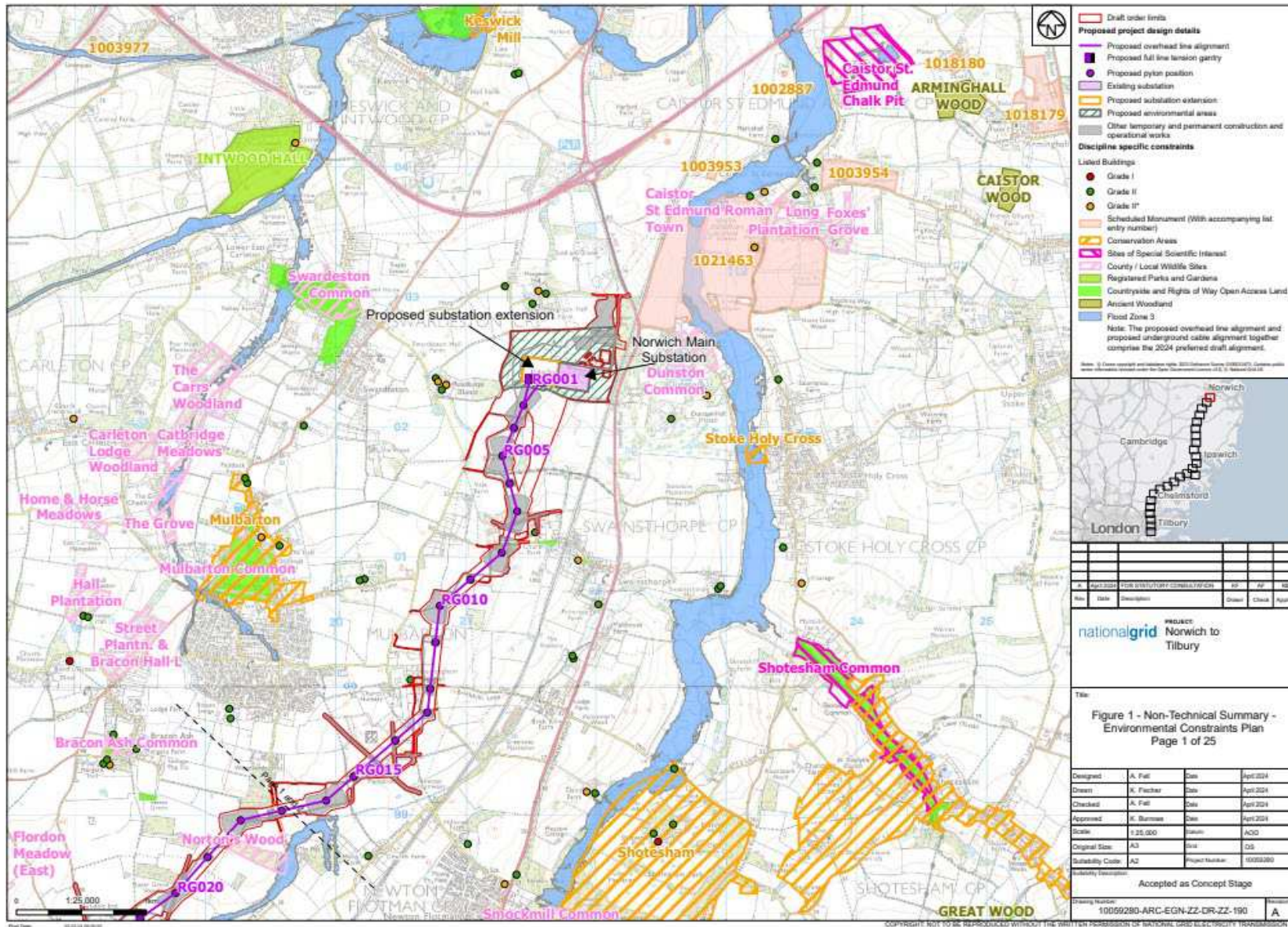
Officer name: Stephen Faulkner – Principal Planner – National Infrastructure Planning Lead Officer

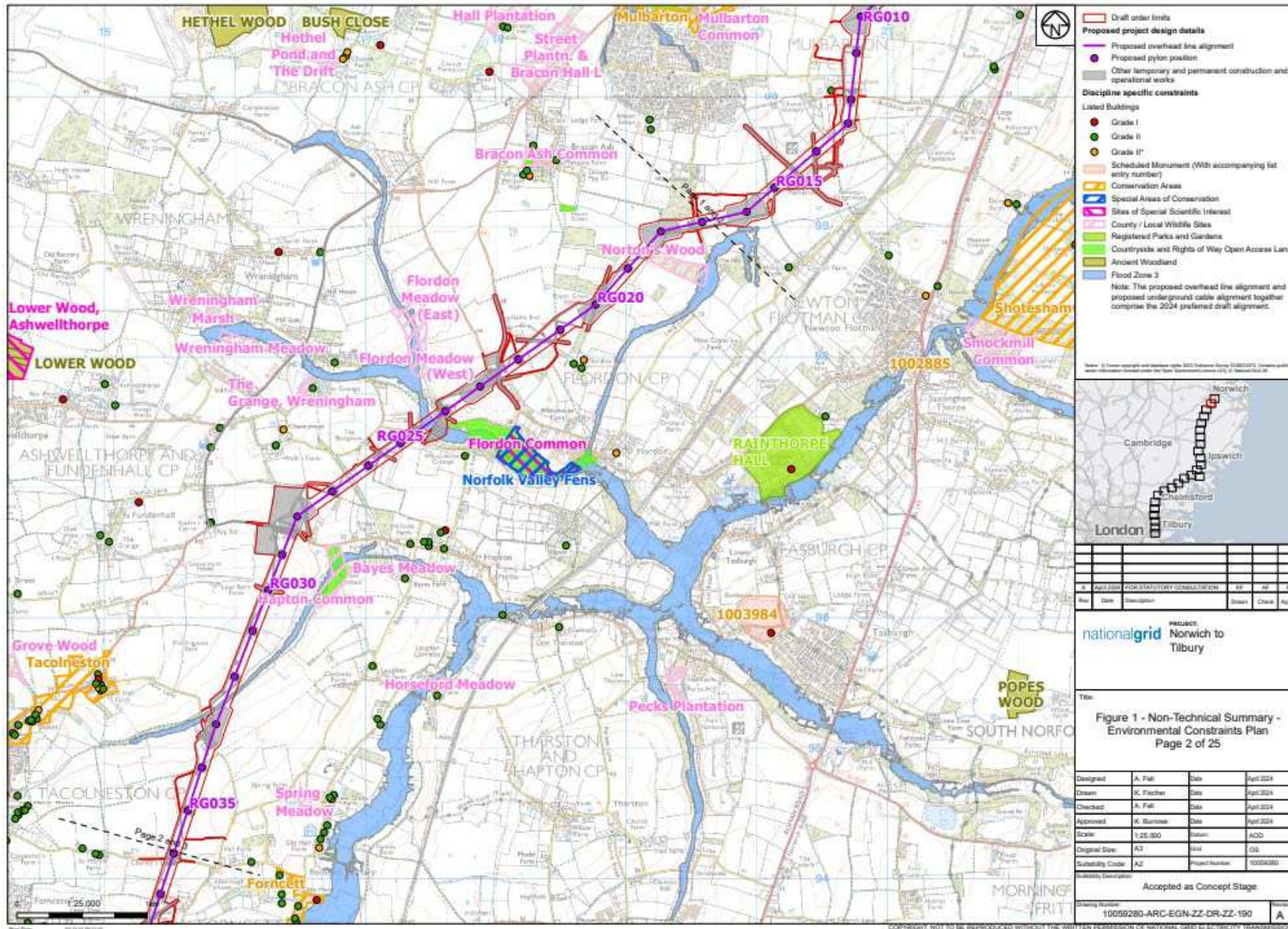
Telephone no.:01603 222752

Email: stephen.faulkner@norfolk.gov.uk



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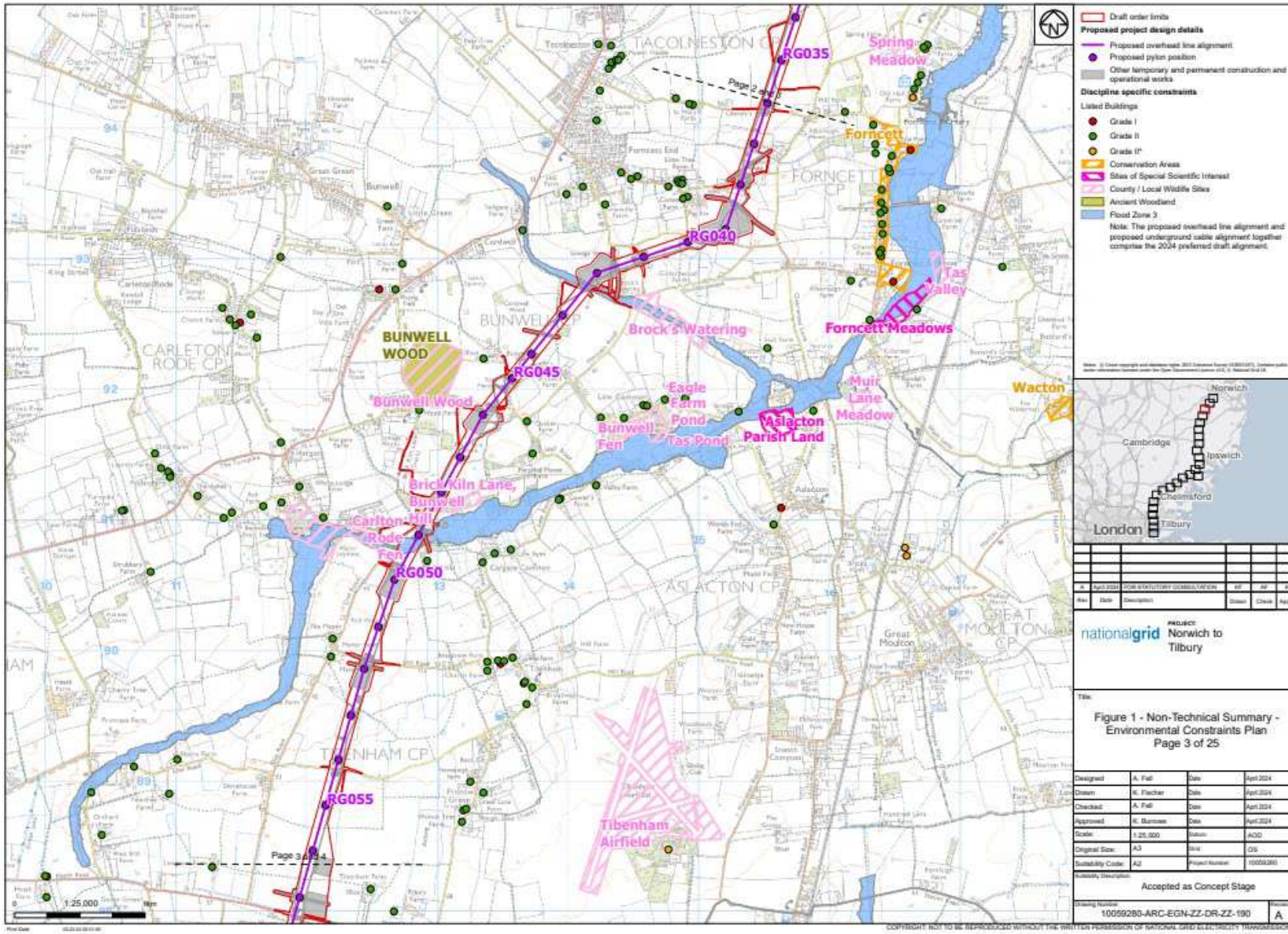


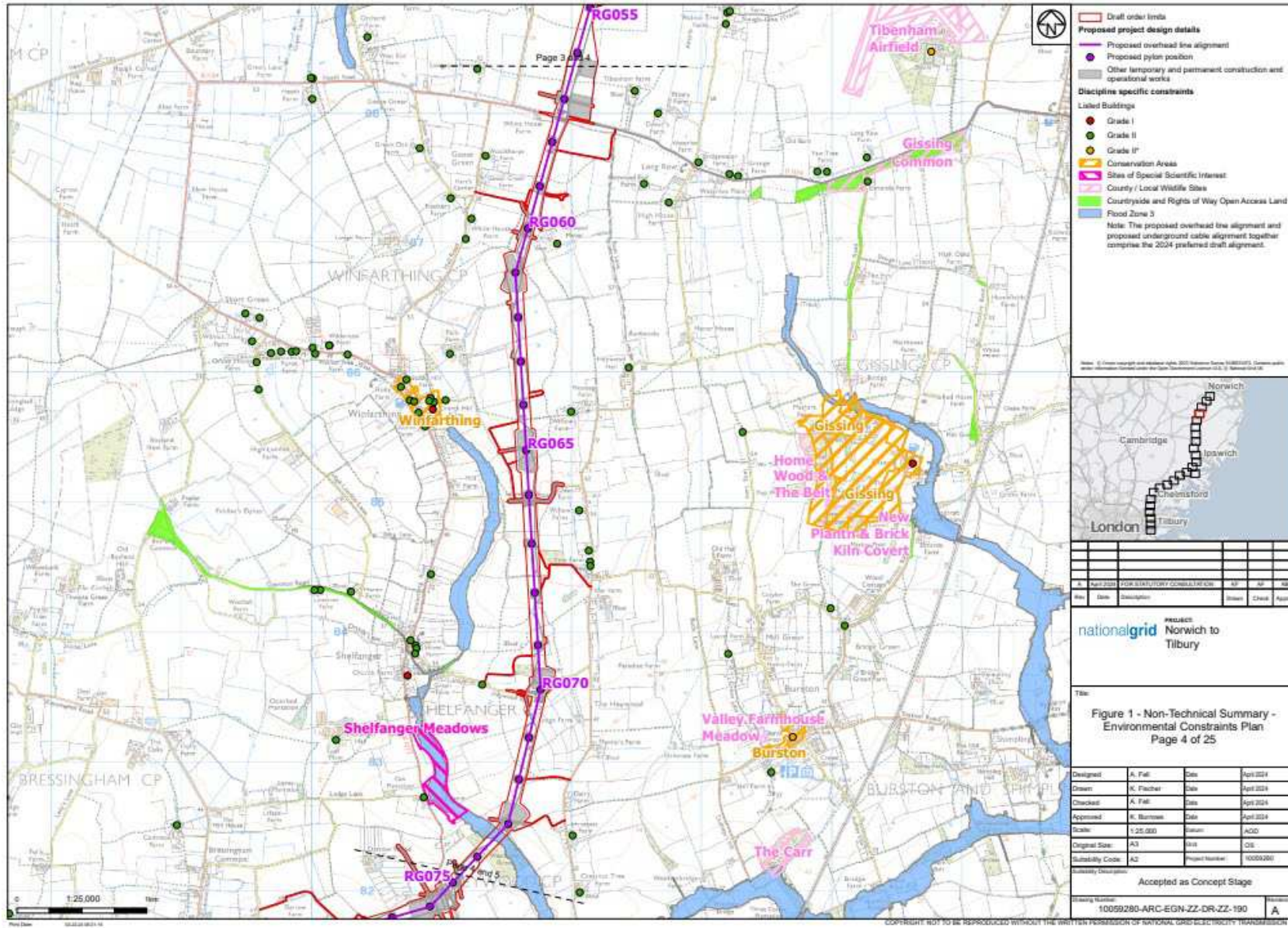
Rev	Iss	Description	Drawn	Check	Appr'd
1	1	Issue for statutory consultation	EG	EG	EG

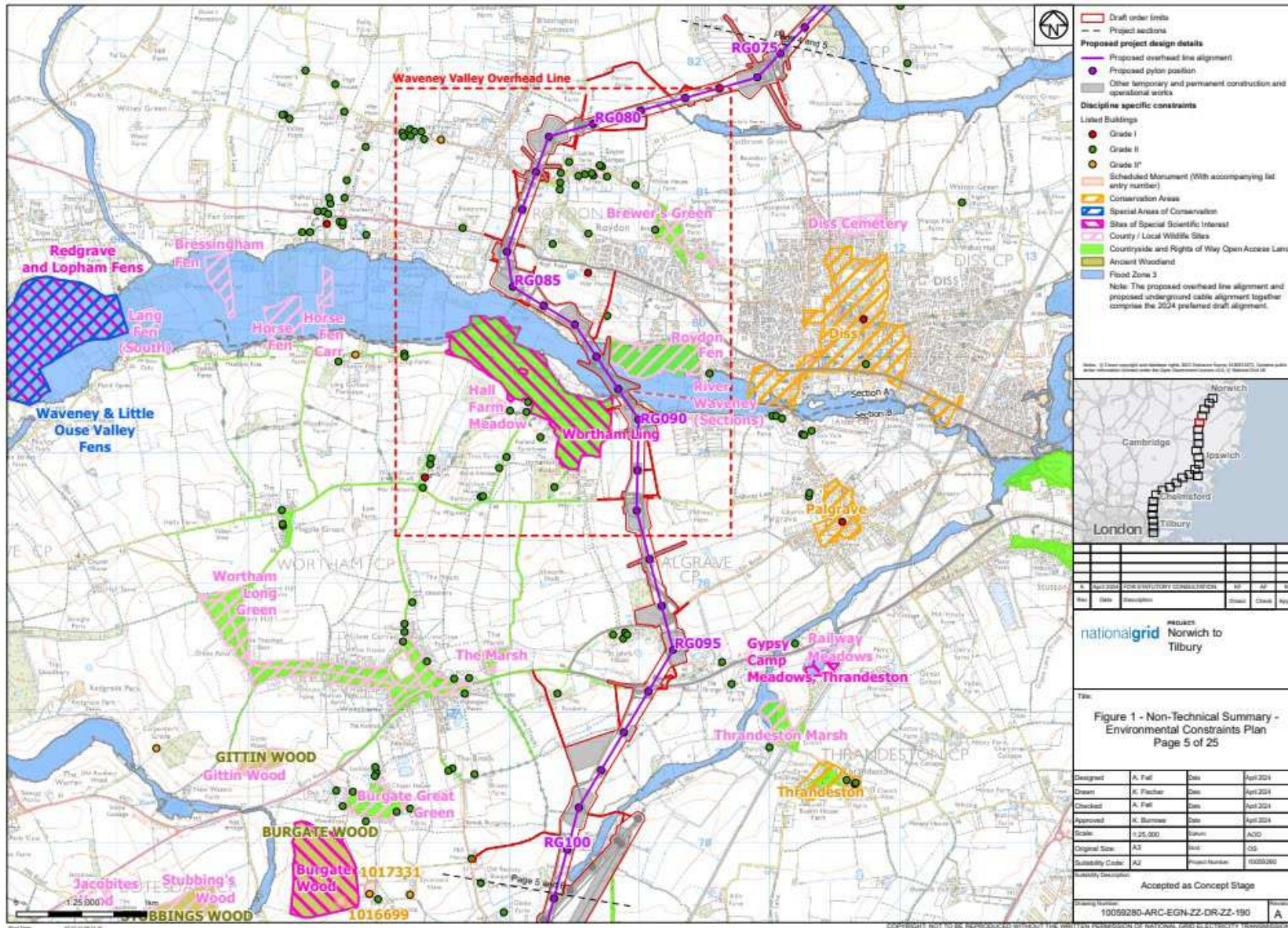
nationalgrid
 Project: Norwich to Tilbury

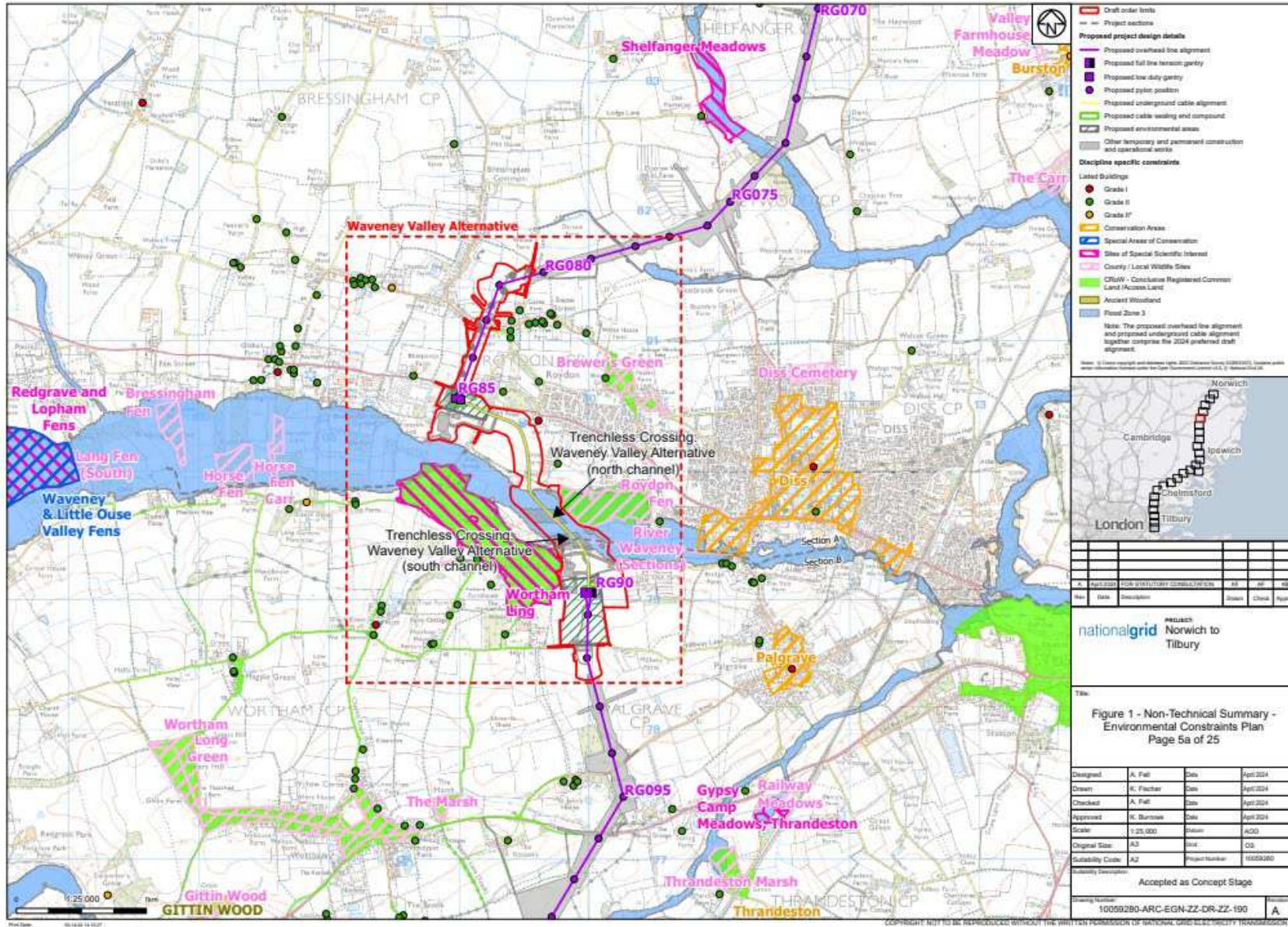
Figure 1 - Non-Technical Summary - Environmental Constraints Plan
 Page 2 of 25

Designed	A. Fall	Date	April 2024
Drawn	K. Fischer	Date	Sept 2024
Checked	A. Fall	Date	April 2024
Approved	K. Burnham	Date	April 2024
Scale	1:25,000	Units	A0D
Original Size	A3	Size	D0
Stability Code	A2	Project Number	1005280
Availability Description			
Accepted as Concept Stage			
Drawing Number	1005280-ARC-EGN-ZZ-DR-ZZ-190		Version
			A









Norwich to Tilbury Overhead Power Line Proposal – Statutory Consultation by National Grid

Full Council Motion - Agreed 7 May 2024

National Grid have opened their statutory consultation concerning the plans for a line of giant pylons to transfer power from offshore windfarms to London, passing through Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex. Residents in the areas affected are outraged by the fact that despite many submissions being made in response to the earlier consultations, there is little evidence that the considerations put by residents, councils, heritage and nature organisations, the only improvements to the proposed route since the previous consultation in the summer of 2023 are:

- The proposed undergrounding (2km) of part of the route to the west of Diss under the River Waveney;
- A series of alignment changes, including at:
 - a) Norwich Main - to avoid a battery storage facility;
 - b) Between Swainsthorpe and Mulbarton – to avoid a solar farm and archaeological site; and
 - c) Aslacton – to reduce effects on woodland.

The County Council continues to recognise the need to add capacity to the existing electricity transmission network and understands that the project would assist in meeting the UK's energy ambition of connecting 50GW of offshore wind by 2030; and meeting the Government's ambitious net zero target by 2050. Nevertheless, there are significant concerns that National Grid have not sufficiently addressed the alternative transmission options set out in the recent Electricity Systems Operator (ESO) Study which include offshore options and undergrounding options.

This County Council will continue to work with our neighbouring County Councils, as evidenced by the Independent Energy Review and Landscape Assessment work, and will continue to favour:

- a) An Offshore alternative; or;
- b) Undergrounding the whole route where the feasibility of an offshore option is not deliverable;

This Council resolves to ask the Leader to write to National Grid asking to:

- a) reconsider the offshore option as the primary solution,
- b) in the alternative consider further undergrounding along the route, particularly in the Diss area, where a recent Landscape Assessment Study commissioned by Norfolk and Suffolk County Councils has identified the importance of the River Waveney and quality of the local landscape; and
- c) consider delivering power to Norfolk to support planned housing and employment growth,
- d) consider suitable compensation for those residents and business affected by any proposals during and as a consequence of any construction.

Scrutiny Committee

Item No: 8

Report Title: Strategic and Financial Planning 2025-26

Date of Meeting: 22 May 2024

Responsible Cabinet Member: Cllr Andrew Jamieson (Cabinet Member for Finance)

Responsible Director: Harvey Bullen, Director of Strategic Finance

Executive Summary

This report supports the Committee's scrutiny of the Council's process for developing the 2025-26 Budget, and in particular represents an opportunity for the Committee to consider the overall timeline and activity required to deliver a balanced budget.

Recommendations

The committee is asked to:

- 1. Consider the attached Cabinet report, providing feedback and recommendations to officers where appropriate.**
- 2. Consider the proposed strategic and financial planning timeline presented by officers and outline the role of scrutiny moving forward.**

1. Background and Purpose

- 1.1. At the Cabinet meeting held on the 8 May 2024, Cabinet Members received the appended paper: Strategic and Financial Planning 2025-26 (Appendix A). The minutes and associated papers for this meeting, including the summary of decisions notice can be found [here](#).
- 1.2. As usual, this has been brought to scrutiny to ensure effective and timely oversight of the 2025-26 budget setting process.
- 1.3. In particular, the appended Cabinet report updates members on:
 - The Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) 2024-29, including details of assumptions about pressures and challenges within the financial model.

- The financial context for budget setting Including budget gap and funding assumptions which provided indications of the medium term financial envelope within which local authorities will operate for 2025-26, and the implications for Norfolk County Council’s 2025-26 budget.
 - The wider financial and organisational context underpinning the process of developing the 2025-26 budget.
 - Key budget risks and uncertainties.
 - An overview of the proposed budget setting process and the minimum proposed savings targets, broken down by department.
- 1.4. This is an annual item that will support the Scrutiny Committee in its duty to provide oversight and challenge to the council’s process for developing the 2025-26 budget. It represents the first opportunity for the Committee to engage with the budget setting process and outline expectations for future Scrutiny.
- 1.5. Scrutiny Members have a duty to provide effective ‘critical friend’ challenge to the annual budget process, ensuring sound financial decision making by reviewing how NCC resources are allocated, and exploring the integration between financial and service planning. Members of the Scrutiny Committee are asked to consider the proposed timeline set out below (excerpted from pg. 12, para. 3.4 of the appended report) and determine whether any additional Scrutiny activity is required.

Budget Setting Timeline 2025-26 as considered by Cabinet 8 May 2024

2025-26 Proposed	Time frame
Cabinet review of the financial planning position for 2025-26 – including formal allocation of targets	8 May 2024
Scrutiny Committee	TBC May 2024
Select Committee input to development of 2025-26 Budget – strategy	TBC 2024
Review of budget pressures and development of budget strategy and detailed savings proposals 2025-29 incorporating: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Budget Challenge 1 (TBC June / July) – context / strategy / approach / outline proposals • Budget Challenge 2 (September) – detail and final proposals 	June to September 2024
Cabinet approve final proposals for public consultation	7 October 2024
Scrutiny Committee	TBC October 2024

Public consultation on 2025-26 Budget proposals, council tax and adult social care precept	Late October to mid December 2024
Select Committee input to development of 2025-26 Budget – comments on specific proposals	TBC November 2024
<i>Government Autumn Statement</i>	<i>TBC October / November 2024</i>
<i>Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement announced including provisional council tax and precept arrangements</i>	<i>TBC December 2024</i>
Cabinet considers outcomes of service and financial planning, EQIA and consultation feedback and agrees revenue budget and capital programme recommendations to County Council	27 January 2025
Confirmation of District Council tax base and Business Rate forecasts	31 January 2025
<i>Final Local Government Finance Settlement</i>	<i>TBC January / February 2025</i>
Scrutiny Committee 2025-26 Budget scrutiny	TBC February 2025
County Council agrees Medium Term Financial Strategy 2025-26 to 2028-29, revenue budget, capital programme and level of council tax for 2025-26	TBC February 2025

2. Evidence and Reasons for Decision

- 2.1 The Council is legally required to set a balanced budget annually. The appended Cabinet report outlines the wider financial and organisational context underpinning the 2025-26 budget setting process.

3. Alternative Options

- 3.1 Highlighted in appended report.

4. Financial Implications

- 4.1 Financial implications are discussed throughout the appended report. The Cabinet paper sets out activity associated with developing the 2025-26 County Council budget.

5. Resource Implications

5.1 Staff:

Highlighted in the appended report.

5.2 Property:

Highlighted in the appended report.

5.3 IT:

Highlighted in the appended report.

6. Other Implications

6.1 Legal Implications:

Highlighted in the appended report.

6.2 Human Rights Implications:

Highlighted in the appended report.

6.3 Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) (this must be included):

Highlighted in the appended report.

6.4 Data Protection Impact Assessments (DPIA):

Highlighted in the appended report.

6.5 Health and Safety implications (where appropriate):

Highlighted in the appended report.

6.6 Sustainability implications (where appropriate):

Highlighted in the appended report.

6.7 Any Other Implications:

None identified.

7. Risk Implications / Assessment

7.1 Highlighted in appended report.

8. Select Committee Comments

8.1 The Select committees are included as part of the proposed timeline for setting the 2025-26 budget, and will be included in discussions in July and October

around the implications for their relevant service areas, which will then be reported back to Cabinet to inform budget setting discussions.

9. Recommendations

To:

1. Consider the attached Cabinet report, providing feedback and recommendations to officers where appropriate.
2. Consider the proposed strategic and financial planning timeline presented by officers and outline the role of scrutiny moving forward.

10. Background Papers

10.1 Appendix A – Strategic and Financial Planning 2025-26

Officer Contact

If you have any questions about matters contained within this paper, please get in touch with:

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Telephone no.: 01603 307570

Email: Peter.randall@norfolk.gov.uk



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Cabinet

Item No: 13

Decision making report title: Strategic and Financial Planning 2025-26

Date of meeting: 8 May 2024

Responsible Cabinet Member: Cllr Andrew Jamieson (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance)

Responsible Director: Harvey Bullen, Director of Strategic Finance

Is this a key decision? Yes

If this is a key decision, date added to the Forward Plan of Key Decisions: 5 March 2024

Introduction from Cabinet Member

This report marks the formal start of the Council's annual budget setting process for 2025-26. The 2024-25 Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy agreed by the Council in February 2024 provides a sound foundation upon which to develop the 2025-26 Budget, but it is nevertheless essential for the Council to have a robust plan in place to enable the preparation of a balanced and sustainable budget. It is the Budget, through the allocation and prioritisation of resources, which provides the framework that enables the achievement of the organisation's key ambitions alongside the delivery of vital services. It is the intention of Cabinet to work with Departments to ensure that savings and pressures linked to demand and demography, are sufficiently robust, so as to ensure that any rise in Council tax is kept to a minimum.

With an upcoming general election, there is very significant uncertainty about funding levels for 2025-26 onwards. One such area of uncertainty is the second homes premium, which may provide some welcome additional funding to support the County Council budget. Alongside this, the Council will seek to earmark an element of the additional funding for use in the area where it has been generated. Further details will be developed when there is greater certainty about the likely income from this source, later in the budget process. In relation to wider funding expectations, the Government's Policy Statement published shortly before the 2024-25 Finance Settlement provided no detail of future year allocations. In this context, and in particular recognising the wider pressures both on demand and within the economy, we must continue to safeguard the delivery of the essential local services which are used and relied on by so many of the County's residents, businesses and visitors.

This report therefore sets out the framework for how the Council will approach budget setting for 2025-26. The proposed approach to budget setting will be informed by the key objectives set out in the Better Together, for Norfolk strategy and as such the Budget represents one of the key building blocks contributing to the delivery of the Council's strategy and direction over the next few years.

Executive Summary

The Council has a robust and well-established process for annual budget setting, including the development of savings proposals, and the scrutiny and challenge of all elements of the budget. This report sets out proposals for how this can be further refined with a greater emphasis on balancing the financial position over the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) period, whilst maintaining the focus on delivering a prudent and transparent approach to budgeting for 2025-26. The proposed approach incorporates the usual required key elements such as public consultation, Scrutiny, and engagement with Select Committees. This report proposes the Budget planning cycle for 2025-26 to start immediately.

As part of 2025-26 Budget setting, a thorough review of identified future cost pressures will also be required. It is particularly important to recognise that recent Budgets have included exceptional levels of inflationary growth pressure, which will not be sustainable in future years, but which reflected the wider operating and economic environment. There may be opportunities to draw back on some of these 2024-25 pressures and this will need to be kept under review as budget monitoring for the year progresses. In addition, the 2024-25 position was supported by one-off measures including use of reserves, which represent a challenge to be addressed in future years. As has been previously identified, the ongoing reliance on reserves does not represent a sustainable long-term approach.

As in previous years, the wider budget position remains the subject of high levels of uncertainty, and despite the publication of the [DLUHC Policy Statement](#) there is no indication of 2025-26 funding levels. In this context, this report sets out details of a proposed budget planning process for 2025-26 but recognises that as always there may be a need for some flexibility. The report accordingly provides a summary of key areas of wider risk and uncertainty for Cabinet to consider.

Recommendations:

Cabinet is recommended:

- 1. To consider the overall budget gap of £135.908m included in the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) set by Full Council in February 2024, and agree:**
 - a. the gap of £44.722m to be closed for 2025-26; and**

- b. the extension of the MTFs by a further year (to 2028-29), adding a further £52.744m to the gap and resulting in additional pressure assumptions to be addressed and leading to an overall gap for planning purposes of £188.652m over the next four years. (Section 2).**
- 2. To review the key budget risks and uncertainties as set out in this report. (Section 10).**
- 3. To consider the principles of the proposed approach to budget setting for 2025-26, noting that there may be a need for flexibility within both the process itself and the assumptions applied, and agree:**
 - a. the process and indicative timetable set out in Section 3, including the proposed consultation process for 2025-26.**
 - b. that there should be a detailed review of cost pressures and growth already provided within the Budget against actual costs experienced to identify any opportunities for budget reduction.**
 - c. the minimum savings targets allocated to each Department to be found (Table 8), and that these will be kept under review throughout the budget process.**
- 4. To approve the initial budget virements for 2024-25 as set out in Appendix 1, reflecting budget transfers for whole services between departments as a result of the Employment Committee of 18 March 2024, while noting the virements do not change the overall Council Budget.**

1. Background and Purpose

- 1.1. In recent years the significant and sustained reductions experienced in Central Government funding to Local Government have lessened, with more generous funding settlements being provided since 2021-22. However, much of the new funding was initially for adult social care reforms and was accompanied by an increasing expectation that local authorities will raise resources locally (through council tax). Alongside this, there continues to be a significant gap between funding and service pressures driven by a complex mix of factors including demographic changes, unfunded burdens such as the National Living Wage, the needs of the people who draw upon social care services becoming increasingly complex, and by the wider economy including (more recently) the abnormally high levels of inflation.

- 1.2. Children's services, in both social care and education remain under very significant stress, and the 2024-25 Local Government Finance Settlement encouraged councils to invest in areas that help place children's social care services on a sustainable financial footing. Other Council services also remain subject to significant financial stress from sustained inflation pressures which have a widespread impact across service delivery and commissioned services. These in their turn have a knock on effect by increasing the pressure placed on discretionary and preventative services both in relation to the need for these to stem and reduce demand, and because these are often the areas called upon to make budgetary savings.
- 1.3. The Council's February 2024 MTFS identified that the Council, in common with other upper tier local authorities, needs to address a material budget shortfall in 2025-26. Simultaneously, as set out in this report, there remains particularly acute uncertainty about the level of funding for 2025-26 and the potential for additional pressures to emerge during the budget setting process. Although the Council's track record of delivering a balanced budget, coupled with a robust budget planning approach, provides a solid basis for development, it is prudent to begin comprehensive planning for 2025-26 now.
- 1.4. As has been the case in recent years, it is anticipated that the Council will not receive any further detailed information about funding allocations for 2025-26 until autumn 2024 at the earliest (and probably December 2024). This is even more the case this year, as almost all of the Government's planned reform of local government funding has been delayed until at least 2026-27. With the expected General Election in 2024 it is extremely unlikely that the 2025-26 Settlement will provide any sort of multi-year allocation which would support the Council to develop its financial strategy with greater planning certainty. As a result, the overall level of uncertainty means that budget setting for 2025-26, and the wider financial environment for local government, is set to remain highly challenging.
- 1.5. The Chancellor of the Exchequer announced the Government's [2024 Spring Budget](#) on 6 March 2024, but this did not include further significant policy announcements in terms of local government funding, which would impact on the budget position.
- 1.6. Therefore, as in previous years, this report represents the start of the Council's process for setting the 2025-26 Budget and developing the associated Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS). The report sets out the context and a proposed approach to budget setting including:
 - A summary of the Budget and MTFS approved by Full Council in February 2024, including the savings already planned for future years.
 - An overview of the significant remaining uncertainties facing local government finances.

- The MTFS position for 2025-26 onwards as agreed in February 2024, extended for a further year to support 2025-26 Budget setting.
- A proposed timetable for 2025-26 Budget setting including the recommended approach to public consultation.
- Proposed savings targets by Department, representing the minimum target to be sought in order to enable Member choice about the ultimate budget decisions to be made in February 2025.

1.7. Ultimately this report is intended to support the Council in preparing the 2025-26 Budget and identifying savings which will assist in delivering a balanced budget for the year.

2. Budget context and Medium Term Financial Strategy

2.1. On 20 February 2024, the County Council approved the 2024-25 Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) to 2027-28. Based on currently available information, the **MTFS set out a budget gap of £135.908m over the period 2025-26 to 2027-28** based on an assumption that the funding allocations set out in the 2024-25 final Local Government Finance Settlement¹ would be broadly “rolled over” for 2025-26 and beyond.

2.2. The Final Local Government Finance Settlement 2024-25 itself only set out funding allocations for one year. The continued failure to publish full medium term funding forecasts remains disappointing and impacts on the Council’s ability to plan over the longer term. The further significant delay to long awaited funding reforms (until at least 2026-27), alongside the absence of any detail at this stage about the likely terms of reference for this funding review, only serves to add further uncertainty to the Council’s financial planning and associated forecasts.

2.3. Announcements in the Final Settlement provided additional funding of £9.539m compared to the previously announced provisional allocations for 2024-25. As a result the 2024-25 Settlement enabled the Council to prepare a balanced 2024-25 Budget, but was not sufficient to support a balanced position over the life of the MTFS. The Council therefore continues to expect to need to draw on its earmarked reserves over the period covered by the MTFS. This is not however a sustainable position in the longer term. Current planning does not include any draw on the Council’s general balances, which are planned to be maintained at the minimum level of at least 5% of the net revenue budget. The use of reserves is also in part a reflection of the various severe cost pressures and challenges in achieving planned savings, which the Council faces across almost all service areas. It is important to recognise that as a result, the Council is not in a position to be able to remove or reverse any of the saving proposals agreed as part of the 2024-25 budget, including those savings which are due for implementation during 2025-26.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/final-local-government-finance-settlement-england-2024-to-2025>

[https://norfolkcounty.sharepoint.com/sites/GOVDR-DemocraticServices/CommitteeSupport/current/ScrutinyCommittee/Agendas & pre-agendas/2024/240522/Finals/8.1. Strategic and Financial Planning - Saving targets.docx](https://norfolkcounty.sharepoint.com/sites/GOVDR-DemocraticServices/CommitteeSupport/current/ScrutinyCommittee/Agendas&pre-agendas/2024/240522/Finals/8.1.StrategicandFinancialPlanning-Savingtargets.docx)

2.4. The table below sets out the high level MTFS position as agreed in February 2024, which has been updated to reflect the addition of a further financial year (for 2028-29) to the planning period in order to maintain the Council's usual four year MTFS horizon.

2.5. As previously stated, the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) agreed in February 2024 set out a gap of £135.908m for the period including a **gap of £44.722m for the first year, 2025-26**. Extending the MTFS for an additional year, 2028-29, based on the same broad assumptions, adds a further £52.744m to the gap to be addressed, resulting in a **total revised gap of £188.652m for the MTFS**. The forecast gap for 2025-26 remains unchanged.

Table 1: Extended MTFS 2024-25 to 2028-29

	2024-25 £m	2025-26 £m	2026-27 £m	2027-28 £m	2028-29 £m
Growth Pressures					
Economic and inflationary	34.670	24.044	24.360	24.902	25.502
Legislative requirements	38.017	7.850	6.500	6.500	6.500
Demand and demographic	39.732	37.608	37.110	38.230	38.161
Policy decisions	9.614	-5.000	3.825	0.005	0.005
Subtotal pressures	122.033	64.502	71.795	69.637	70.168
Identified savings	-41.532	-12.059	-8.989	-7.923	0.000
Funding changes	-46.460	10.066	0.000	0.000	0.000
Council tax changes	-34.041	-17.787	-16.420	-16.915	-17.423
Forecast Gap (Surplus)/Deficit	0.000	44.722	46.386	44.800	52.744

2.6. The gap in 2025-26 is substantially being driven by the elements set out in the table below. Further details of MTFS assumptions are also provided below.

Table 2: Commentary on 2025-26 MTFS pressure assumptions

	2025-26 £m	Detail
Economic and inflationary pressures	24.044	Pay assumed at 3% for 2025-26 equates to £10m, price inflation includes £8.3m Adult Social Care, £3.7m Children's Services, £3.6m CES.
Legislative requirements	7.850	£5.0m relates to Adult Social Care and £3.0m Children's Services pay and price market pressures (including National Living Wage).
Demand and demographic pressures	37.608	£6.1m relates to Adults demographic growth. £3.5m Children's Services demographic growth. £2.0m relates to waste tonnages. £25.5m held centrally as provision for anticipated service growth.
Council policy decisions	-5.000	Reversals of one-off growth provided in 2024-25.
Net total pressures	64.502	
Funding changes	10.066	Significant uncertainty exists around Government funding within the Settlement. Assumption that additional funding provided from the Final Settlement for 2024-25 is one-off.
Savings	-12.059	Existing savings built in for 2025-26.
Total	62.510	Pressures, saving and funding changes

2.7. A summary of budget growth and other changes currently incorporated in 2024-25 planning are shown in the table below by Department. (Revised net budgets following the departmental changes from the 18 March Employment Committee can be seen in [Appendix 1](#)).

Table 3: 2025-26 MTFs net budget by Department

	Adult Social Services £m	Children's Services £m	Community and Environmental Services £m	Strategy and Transformation £m	Chief Executive's Directorate £m	Finance £m	Total £m
Base Budget 2024-25	281.967	238.592	203.268	30.184	4.384	-230.646	527.748
Growth							
Economic / Inflationary	10.694	6.923	4.365	1.143	0.127	0.792	24.044
Legislative Requirements	5.000	3.000	0.050	-0.200	0.000	0.000	7.850
Demand / Demographic	6.100	3.500	2.508	0.000	0.000	25.500	37.608
NCC Policy	-2.000	-3.110	-0.600	-1.219	0.118	1.811	-5.000
Total Growth	19.794	10.313	6.323	-0.276	0.245	28.103	64.502
Savings	-7.400	-6.113	0.543	2.201	0.290	-1.580	-12.059
Funding changes	0.000	8.706	0.000	0.200	0.000	1.161	10.066
Base Budget 2025-26	294.360	251.497	210.134	32.310	4.919	-202.962	590.258

Funded by: Council Tax	-545.535
Collection Fund Surplus	0.000
Total	-545.535
Budget Gap	44.722

2.8. The key assumptions underpinning the forecast gap in the current MTFS position include:

- Planned savings of £70.503m being delivered over the MTFS period:

Table 4: Savings in MTFS by Department

	2024-25 £m	2025-26 £m	2026-27 £m	2027-28 £m	2024-28 £m
Adult Social Services	-14.252	-7.400	-4.900	-2.600	-29.152
Children's Services	-9.775	-6.113	-7.449	-5.703	-29.040
Community and Environmental Services	-9.665	0.543	-0.240	0.400	-8.962
Strategy and Transformation	0.460	2.201	0.040	-0.020	2.681
Chief Executive's Directorate	-0.330	0.290	0.000	0.000	-0.040
Finance	-7.970	-1.580	3.560	0.000	-5.990
Savings total	-41.532	-12.059	-8.989	-7.923	-70.503

- Government funding will be broadly flat in 2025-26 (i.e. essentially a rollover of 2024-25 funding levels) with the additional funding provided at the Final Settlement currently assumed to be one-off. This assumption includes Settlement Funding (RSG, business rates), Rural Services Delivery Grant, Social Care Grant(s), Better Care Fund / improved Better Care Fund, Public Health Grant, and Services Grant.
- Cost pressures for 2025-26 including:
 - 3% for pay inflation in 2025-26 and each year thereafter.
 - Price inflation in line with contractual rates or CPI forecasts where appropriate totalling £15.7m in 2025-26. It should be noted that **the MTFS assumes a material reduction in inflationary pressures compared to the level provided for in the 2023-24 and 2024-25 Budgets.**
 - Demographic growth pressures for Adults, Childrens, Waste totalling £12.1m in 2025-26, plus a contingency **assumption of £25.5m for further pressures.** If identified pressures exceed this level, there will be a need to find equivalent additional savings to achieve a balanced Budget position for 2025-26. Equally however, if any of this provision is not required, it will enable the level of savings sought to be reduced.
- Increases in council tax over the MTFS period, including **an assumed 2.99% increase in 2025-26 for planning purposes** as agreed by Full Council in February 2024 and shown in the following table. It should be noted that **every 1% change in council tax assumptions increases or decreases the budget gap by approximately £5.3m in 2025-26.**

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Table 5: MTF5 council tax assumptions

2.9. The council tax assumptions shown are those agreed by Full Council in February 2024.

	2025-26 £m	2026-27 £m	2027-28 £m	2028-29 £m
Council tax increase	-10.541	-10.965	-11.295	-11.635
Council tax collection fund	3.295	0.000	0.000	0.000
Council tax base	-5.245	-5.455	-5.620	-5.789
Council tax ASC precept	-5.297	0.000	0.000	0.000
Total	-17.788	-16.420	-16.914	-17.423

	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29
Band D %	1.99%	1.99%	1.99%	1.99%
ASC Precept % ²	1.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Tax base % change assumption	1.00%	1.00%	1.00%	1.00%

Second Homes Premium

2.10. The Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023 allows billing authorities to charge an additional premium of 100 per cent on a property which is substantially furnished and where there is no resident (i.e., second homes, referred to in the Act as 'dwellings occupied periodically').

2.11. The billing authority will exercise their own judgment as to whether to apply a premium and at what level (up to 100 per cent). Most of the District councils in Norfolk have already decided to apply the second homes premium from 2025-26. The premium will provide councils with the flexibility to access additional revenue. Under council tax regulations, income generated from the premium would be shared between those bodies which charge council tax, in line with the proportional split of total council tax. The opportunity to charge a second homes council tax premium therefore has the potential to generate significant additional income for all organisations in Norfolk which charge council tax.

2.12. Additional council tax raised from the second homes premium in 2025-26 could make a material difference to the Council's financial position for 2025-26 onwards. However, until District decisions about implementation and exemptions, and (most importantly) the impact on Districts forecast tax base for the year are known, there is a high degree of uncertainty about the actual level of additional income that the premium would generate. The premium is

² Decisions about the Precept offer are made annually by Government and there is currently no indication on levels for 2025-26 onwards.

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ultimately intended to deliver behaviour change, and it is unclear to what extent this will be achieved, and over what timeframe.

2.13. It is also unclear at this stage what assumptions Government may make within the 2025-26 settlement in terms of the additional income they expect councils to generate. It is possible that Government may incorporate these estimates within the settlement model and therefore it would be prudent for County to be cautious about the ability to rely on this income at this stage. Accordingly, the County Council has currently made no assumptions about additional income from second homes in the 2025-26 Budget planning / MTFS.

2.14. Taking these assumptions into account, the forecast net budget (before new savings) within the approved MTFS is shown below.

Table 6: MTFS Net Budget by Department

	2024-25 £m	2025-26 £m	2026-27 £m	2027-28 £m	2028-29 £m
Adult Social Services	281.967	294.360	311.305	331.350	353.638
Children's Services	238.592	251.497	255.582	261.536	273.373
Community and Environmental Services	203.268	210.134	216.546	223.622	230.417
Strategy and Transformation	30.184	32.310	33.087	34.232	35.431
Chief Executive's Directorate	4.384	4.919	5.177	5.320	5.468
Finance	-230.646	-202.962	-168.634	-141.283	-113.382
Total Net Budget	527.748	590.258	653.064	714.778	784.945
Council Tax	-527.748	-545.535	-561.955	-578.870	-596.293
Budget Gap (cumulative)	0.000	44.722	91.108	135.908	188.651

3. Proposals

3.1. The following principles for 2025-26 budget setting are proposed:

- **Two rounds of Budget Challenge** (initial proposals in late June / early July and detailed proposals in September).
- **Allocation of the £44.722m saving target** on analysis of a “controllable spend” approach (see section 3.5) consistent with previous years.
- **Budget planning to cover the period 2025-26 to 2028-29** (extending the current Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) by one year).
- To closely scrutinise any requests for additions to the Capital Programme for 2025-26 requiring additional borrowing to consider the value for money

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of proposals and assess their impact on the affordability of the revenue budget and MTFs, ensuring that borrowing levels are maintained within appropriate prudent limits and the revenue budget remains robust.

- Select Committees to have a role as part of the budget-setting process, considering areas for savings in July 2024 and commenting on detailed proposals in November 2024.
- Final decisions about the 2025-26 Budget to be taken in February 2025 in line with the budget setting timetable as set out below.

3.2. It is proposed that the approach to budget development should include:

- A review of all current pressures with a view to reducing the level required, which will include a process to challenge, understand, and approve all growth within 2025-26 Budget planning;
- A requirement that a business case is submitted for requests to access the £25.5m growth provision held corporately and that this will be subject to a prioritisation process as part of Budget Challenge;
- A review of all earmarked revenue reserves with a view to releasing funding where possible (noting that this would provide a one-off gain which would impact on the future year gap);
- A review of the Council's commercial opportunities, including scope to achieve increased income;
- A review to consider the scope to extend existing saving proposals;
- Identification of new savings against the minimum target of £45m to enable Member choice;
- Consideration of opportunities for greater integration between performance reporting, business planning, and budget development; and
- Consideration of the impact and budget requirements in relation to progress towards the [County Deal](#).

3.3. It should be noted that the changes during the budget setting process may result in the saving targets currently allocated to Services being revised (and potentially materially increased) in the event that further pressures or income changes arise. Options to address any shortfall in savings to close the 2025-26 Budget gap will ultimately include:

- Government providing additional funding;
- Corporate / centrally identified savings opportunities;
- The removal or mitigation of currently identified budget pressures; and
- Service departments identifying further savings.

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3.4. The Budget agreed in February 2024 included a high level timetable for the 2025-26 budget process. The detailed timescales for internal budget planning activity will be confirmed following approval of the proposed approach by May Cabinet. The Budget process will also be informed through the year by any Government Budget announcements, Spending Reviews or other fiscal events, and Local Government Settlement, as well as any progress on reforms such as the Funding Review. The specific timing for these is currently unknown.

Table 7: Proposed Budget setting timetable 2025-26

2025-26 Proposed	Time frame
Cabinet review of the financial planning position for 2025-26 – including formal allocation of targets	8 May 2024
Scrutiny Committee	TBC May 2024
Select Committee input to development of 2025-26 Budget – strategy	TBC 2024
Review of budget pressures and development of budget strategy and detailed savings proposals 2025-29 incorporating: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Budget Challenge 1 (TBC June / July) – context / strategy / approach / outline proposals Budget Challenge 2 (September) – detail and final proposals 	June to September 2024
Cabinet approve final proposals for public consultation	7 October 2024
Scrutiny Committee	TBC October 2024
Public consultation on 2025-26 Budget proposals, council tax and adult social care precept	Late October to mid December 2024
Select Committee input to development of 2025-26 Budget – comments on specific proposals	TBC November 2024
<i>Government Autumn Statement</i>	<i>TBC October / November 2024</i>
<i>Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement announced including provisional council tax and precept arrangements</i>	<i>TBC December 2024</i>
Cabinet considers outcomes of service and financial planning, EQIA and consultation feedback and agrees revenue budget and capital programme recommendations to County Council	27 January 2025
Confirmation of District Council tax base and Business Rate forecasts	31 January 2025
<i>Final Local Government Finance Settlement</i>	<i>TBC January / February 2025</i>
Scrutiny Committee 2025-26 Budget scrutiny	TBC February 2025
County Council agrees Medium Term Financial Strategy 2025-26 to 2028-29, revenue budget, capital programme and level of council tax for 2025-26	TBC February 2025

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3.5. In respect of the allocation of 2025-26 savings, it is proposed to:

1. **Seek to deliver efficiency savings via a target of 3% applied to support services.** This approach recognises that work has been undertaken to design a corporate centre function with the right capability and capacity to support the wider organisation. It would be inconsistent with the overall rationale if this newly established function were to be diminished through the application of an arbitrary budget target. However it is also recognised that it is appropriate to continue to expect these services to seek to deliver continuous improvement and value for money. The application of a 3% target recognises the challenge for the corporate centre to be more efficient in this context.
2. **Allocation of the remaining savings requirement across the front line departments,** based on applying the approach adopted in previous years. This is based on exclusion of “non controllable” spend, and ringfenced budgets, such as Schools, and capital financing items and then allocating a target based on the overall proportion of the controllable budget.
3. Existing departmental budget savings from previous budget rounds have been deducted from the savings requirement to produce the **new savings target** for each department. This seeks to address forecast future year budget gaps, with the aspiration to achieve a balanced position over the whole MTFs while ensuring any savings a department proposes for future years are recognised in that future year’s target setting rather than being “lost”; any additional pressures which arise are applied in the same ratio; and any one-off savings come back in the future year targets for that department.

3.6. This renders the following saving targets, representing the minimum savings level required to enable Member choice within the budget setting process for 2025-26:

Table 8: Allocation of Saving Target by Department

	2025-26 £m	2026-27 £m	2027-28 £m	2028-29 £m	Total MTFS saving target £m
Adult Social Care	19.500	22.750	21.750	24.250	88.250
Children's Services	8.500	7.250	7.250	13.000	36.000
Communities and Environment	2.750	2.000	1.750	1.750	8.250
Infrastructure	9.250	9.500	9.000	8.500	36.250
Fire and Rescue	1.500	1.500	1.500	1.500	6.000
Strategy and Transformation	1.500	1.500	1.500	1.500	6.000
Chief Executive's Directorate	0.250	0.250	0.250	0.250	1.000
Finance	1.500	1.750	1.750	2.000	7.000
Total	44.750	46.500	44.750	52.750	188.750

3.7. The allocation of savings targets has used the new departmental structure from the Employment Committee of 18 March 2024. Future reporting of savings delivery and departmental budget breakdowns will be based on the new structure.

3.8. The saving targets in Table 8 reflect the savings currently forecast to be required to deliver a balanced budget over the whole MTFS period. It should be noted that to the extent budget gaps remain for future years following the conclusion of the 2025-26 budget process, these will be reallocated as new targets for services in future year budget rounds and individual departmental targets could therefore be adjusted at that point.

3.9. As previously highlighted, the Council is not in a position to be able to remove or reverse any of the saving proposals agreed as part of the 2024-25 budget, including those savings which are due for implementation during 2025-26. The total savings requirement including both the existing savings and new savings target will need to be delivered to close the 2025-26 budget gap. If a department is not in a position to deliver existing savings, replacement savings of the same amount will need to be included by that department in the 2025-26 budget.

Table 9: Existing Savings, New Savings Target and Total Savings Requirement by Department

	2025-26 existing savings³ £m	2025-26 new savings target £m	2025-26 total savings requirement £m
Adult Social Care	8.000	19.500	27.500
Children's Services	6.113	8.500	14.613
Communities and Environment	-0.687	2.750	2.063
Infrastructure	0.087	9.250	9.337
Fire and Rescue	0.200	1.500	1.700
Strategy and Transformation	-2.201	1.500	-0.701
Chief Executive's Directorate	-0.290	0.250	-0.040
Finance	0.837	1.500	2.337
Total	12.059	44.750	56.809

Table 10: Total Savings Requirement to be delivered over MTFS (including new targets and previously identified proposals)

	2025-26 £m	2026-27 £m	2027-28 £m	2028-29 £m	Total MTFS savings requirement £m
Adult Social Care	27.500	27.650	24.350	24.250	103.750
Children's Services	14.613	14.699	12.953	13.000	55.264
Communities and Environment	2.063	2.020	1.750	1.750	7.584
Infrastructure	9.337	9.720	8.600	8.500	36.158
Fire and Rescue	1.700	1.500	1.500	1.500	6.200
Strategy and Transformation	-0.701	1.460	1.520	1.500	3.779
Chief Executive's Directorate	-0.040	0.250	0.250	0.250	0.710
Finance	2.337	1.990	1.750	2.000	8.077
Total	56.809	59.289	52.673	52.750	221.522

³ Negative values represent the reversal of one-off saving proposals, including use of reserves, from prior years.

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4. Impact of the Proposal

4.1. This paper sets out an outline timetable and approach to the Council's budget planning process for 2025-26, while recognising that significant risks and uncertainties remain. The proposals in this report are intended to:

- set the context for service financial planning for the year to come;
- provide a robust approach to tackling the budget gap forecast for the whole MTFS period;
- assist the Council in managing the continuing significant uncertainty around local authority funding including funding reform while providing sufficient flexibility to respond to any changes required; and
- contribute to the Council setting a balanced budget for 2025-26.

5. Evidence and Reasons for Decision

5.1. In the context of continuing significant financial pressures and delays to Government plans for funding reform, it remains critical that the Council has a robust approach to budget setting and the identification of saving proposals. After more than a decade of savings delivery, the ability to continue to identify achievable savings at the scale required is becoming increasingly challenged. The preparation of a balanced budget for 2025-26 is key to ensuring that the necessary resources are available to continue to progress with the implementation of the Council's key strategic ambitions, as well as the delivery of crucial day to day services.

5.2. It therefore remains essential to continue to engage with Government, MPs and other stakeholders to campaign for adequate and sustainable funding for Norfolk to enable the delivery of vital services to residents, businesses and visitors. Although funding reform plans have been delayed, it is still important that Government focuses on this issue and provides guidance on the direction of travel for reforms, financial planning assumptions, and indicative funding allocations for the medium term, as soon as possible.

5.3. The size of the budget gap forecast for 2025-26 is such that there is a risk that the Council will be obliged to consider reductions in service levels. As a result it is important that the process of identifying, and consulting on, savings proposals is undertaken as soon as possible and in particular that a full suite of proposals is brought forward for Cabinet to consider in October. This will provide adequate time for consultation and engagement work around saving proposals, which should, in turn, support effective mobilisation, implementation and delivery of any proposals that are ultimately agreed to provide a full year saving for 2025-26.

5.4. The Council's planning within the MTFFS forecast is based on the position agreed in February 2024 and it is important to note that this will be kept under review throughout the 2025-26 Budget setting process, particularly in the event that further information about funding becomes available. It nevertheless remains prudent to establish a process to begin planning for savings at the level required to close the underlying gap identified in February 2024.

5.5. The proposals in the report are intended to reflect a proportionate response to the challenges and uncertainties present in the 2025-26 planning process and will ultimately support the Council to develop a robust budget for the year.

6. Alternative Options

6.1. This report sets out a framework for developing detailed saving proposals for 2025-26 and at this stage no proposals have been agreed, meaning that a range of alternative options remain open.

6.2. In addition, there are a number of areas where Cabinet could choose to consider different parameters for the budget setting process, such as:

- Adopting an alternative allocation of targets between services, or retaining a target corporately.
- Considering an alternative timetable within the time constraints required to develop proposals, undertake public consultation, and meet statutory deadlines for the setting of council tax.
- Changing assumptions within the MTFFS (including the level of council tax assumed for planning purposes) and therefore varying the level of savings sought. **Every 1% change in the level of council tax (or ASC precept) would equate to approximately +/- £5.3m of savings to be identified as part of the 2025-26 Budget.**

6.3. The planning context for the Council will be updated if further information becomes available. Final decisions about the overall shape of the 2025-26 Budget, savings, and council tax will not be made until February 2025.

7. Financial Implications

7.1. Financial implications are discussed in detail throughout this report, which sets out the proposed indicative savings targets which will need to be found by each department to contribute to closing the 2025-26 and future year budget gap, subject to formal approval by Full Council in February 2025. The proposals in the report will require services to identify further significant savings to be delivered against current budget levels. The experience of budget setting in recent years has demonstrated that the scope to achieve savings at the level required is becoming increasingly challenging in the context of service delivery expectations, and existing saving programmes. It should also be noted that

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there is an increased level of risk following actions required (including use of reserves) to deliver a balanced budget in 2023-24, as there is reduced flexibility within the overall finances as a result. Therefore close monitoring and tight financial control will be required in 2024-25 to mitigate any risk of increasing the budget gap, which would have a knock on impact for the 2025-26 budget. As previously highlighted, there remains a risk that the Council will be obliged to consider reductions in service levels, and it is therefore crucial that proposals to deliver the full £44.750m savings target are identified in full for consideration by Cabinet in October.

- 7.2. The Council is legally required to set a balanced Budget annually and should plan to achieve this using a prudent set of assumptions. However, Cabinet could choose to vary the allocation of indicative targets between directorates, or to establish an alternative approach to identifying savings. Taking into account the savings already planned for 2024-25 and future years, the scale of the budget gap and savings required are such that if the Council is required to continue to identify and deliver savings at this level there remains a risk that this could threaten the Council's ability to continue to fully deliver its statutory responsibilities. As such the Government's response and decisions about Council funding in 2025-26 will be hugely significant. Any changes in Government funding could have a material impact on both the level of savings to be identified, and the Council's wider budget process. Government has hitherto failed to deliver the level of funding needed in recognition of the importance and costs of providing social care, and to adequately fund local authorities to provide these and other vital services. In spite of improvements in recent settlements, fundamentally there remains an urgent need for a larger quantum of funding to be provided to local government to deliver a sustainable operating environment for future years.
- 7.3. Work to deliver additional Government funding could therefore have an impact on the overall budget gap to be addressed. Equally, in the event that future funding allocations or reform sees resources shifted away from shire counties, the Council's forecast gap for 2025-26 or future years could increase. At this point, Government has not confirmed details of the proposed approach or timescales for consultation on funding reform, but they are not anticipated until 2026-27 at the earliest. Many key assumptions about 2025-26 funding remain to be confirmed and should be considered a key area of risk.
- 7.4. As a result of the above, the budget setting process and savings targets will be kept under review as budget planning progresses. In the event that additional budget pressures for 2025-26 emerge through budget planning, there may be a requirement to revisit the indicative saving targets.

8. Resource Implications

- 8.1. **Staff:** There are no direct implications arising from this report although there is a potential that staffing implications may be linked to specific saving proposals

developed. These will be identified as they arise later in the budget planning process.

8.2. **Property:** There are no direct property implications arising from this report although existing saving plans include activities linked to property budgets and assumptions around capital receipts to be achieved.

8.3. **IT:** There are no direct IT implications arising from this report although existing saving plans include activities linked to IMT budgets. In addition, activities planned within Business Transformation will include further work to deliver savings through activity related to digital and IT initiatives.

9. Other Implications

9.1. **Legal Implications:** This report sets out a process that will enable the Council to set a balanced budget for 2025-26 in line with statutory requirements, including those relating to setting council tax, and undertaking public consultation.

9.2. **Human Rights implications:** No specific human rights implications have been identified.

9.3. **Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) (this must be included):** Any saving proposals with an impact on service delivery will require public consultation, and an Equality Impact Assessment of all proposals will need to be completed as part of budget-setting in due course. The results of public consultation and the findings of all EqIAs will be presented to Cabinet in January 2025 in order to inform budget recommendations to County Council.

9.4. No specific EqIA has been undertaken in respect of this report, although the EqIA in relation to the 2024-25 Budget can be found as part of the [budget papers considered in February 2024](#).

9.5. **Data Protection Impact Assessments (DPIA):** None identified.

9.6. **Health and Safety implications (where appropriate):** None identified.

9.7. **Sustainability implications (where appropriate):** There are no direct sustainability implications arising from this report although existing 2024-25 budget plans include funding for activities which may have an impact on the environmental sustainability of the County Council through the delivery of the Environmental Policy. These issues were considered in more detail within the February budget report to Full Council. Further details are set out in the [Climate Strategy](#). Ultimately sustainability issues and any associated financial implications in relation to either new 2025-26 proposals, or activities developed during 2024-25, will need to be fully considered once such initiatives are finalised, and incorporated as part of budget setting in February 2025.

9.8. **Any other implications:** Significant issues, risks, assumptions and implications have been set out throughout the report.

10. Risk Implications/Assessment

10.1. Significant risks have been identified throughout this report. Risks in respect of the MTFS were also set out within the February 2024 report to Full Council.

10.2. A number of significant uncertainties remain which could have an impact on the overall scale of the budget gap to be addressed in 2025-26, linked to ongoing uncertainty around local government (and wider public sector finances) including:

- further “cost of living” pressures and the wider economic impacts, including impact on demand for services;
- implications of higher interest rates for borrowing costs across both the revenue and capital budgets;
- implications of increases in the National Living Wage;
- the progress of funding reforms (previously the Fair Funding Review) now likely to be developed for implementation in 2026-27 at the earliest;
- Government decisions about the council tax referendum limit or further ASC precept flexibilities in 2025-26 and beyond;
- the need for a long-term financial settlement for local government;
- delivery of other reforms to local government funding including further details of the approach to Adult Social Care reforms to implement the cap on care costs, and changes to other funding streams;
- progress on delivery of the Safety Valve programme and implementation of Local First Inclusion within Children’s Services;
- progress of various elements of Government policy including levelling up, delivery of the County Deal.

10.3. The Council’s Corporate Risk Register provides a full description of corporate risks, including corporate level financial risks, mitigating actions and the progress made in managing the level of risk. A majority of risks, if not treated, could have significant financial consequences such as failing to generate income or to realise savings. These corporate risks include:

- RM001 – Infrastructure funding requirements

[https://norfolkcounty.sharepoint.com/sites/GOVDR-DemocraticServices/Committee Support/current/Scrutiny Committee/Agendas & pre-agendas/2024/240522/Finals/8.1. Strategic and Financial Planning - Saving targets.docx](https://norfolkcounty.sharepoint.com/sites/GOVDR-DemocraticServices/CommitteeSupport/current/Scrutiny%20Committee/Agendas%20&%20pre-agendas/2024/240522/Finals/8.1.Strategic%20and%20Financial%20Planning%20-%20Saving%20targets.docx)

- RM006 – Service delivery – The potential risk of failure to deliver our services within the resources available for the period 2023-24 to the end of 2024-25.
- RM022b – Replacement EU Funding for Economic Growth
- RM031 – NCC Funded Children's Services Overspend due to demand pressure
- RM035 – Adverse impact of significant and abnormal levels of inflationary pressure on revenue and capital budgets
- RM039 – Financial, Staffing & Market Stability impacts due to implementation of Social Care Reform (now October 2025)
- RM042 – Increasing Challenges to Maintaining Financial Resilience
- RM043 - High Needs Block Deficit cannot be resolved

Further details of all corporate risks, including those outlined above, can be found in Appendix C of the [April 2024 Risk Management report to Cabinet](#) (item 15). There is close oversight of the Council's expenditure with monthly financial reports to Cabinet. Any emerging risks arising will continue to be identified and treated as necessary.

11. Select Committee comments

- 11.1. Select Committees provided commentary and input to the 2024-25 Budget process during budget development, and this was reported to Cabinet at various stages of the process. No specific input has been sought from Select Committees in respect of this report, however Select Committees are expected to again have the opportunity to comment when they consider the implications of 2025-26 budget setting for the service areas within their remit when they meet during the year as set out in the proposed timetable.

12. Recommendations

- 12.1. Cabinet is recommended:

- 1. To consider the overall budget gap of £135.908m included in the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) set by Full Council in February 2024, and agree:**
 - a. the gap of £44.722m to be closed for 2025-26; and**
 - b. the extension of the MTFS by a further year (to 2028-29), adding a further £52.744m to the gap and resulting in additional pressure assumptions to be addressed and leading to an overall gap for planning purposes of £188.652m over the next four years. (Section 2).**

2. To review the key budget risks and uncertainties as set out in this report. (Section 10).

3. To consider the principles of the proposed approach to budget setting for 2025-26, noting that there may be a need for flexibility within both the process itself and the assumptions applied, and agree:
 - a. the process and indicative timetable set out in Section 3, including the proposed consultation process for 2025-26.
 - b. that there should be a detailed review of cost pressures and growth already provided within the Budget (including 2024-25 inflation provisions) against actual costs experienced to identify any opportunities for budget reduction.
 - c. the minimum savings targets allocated to each Department to be found (Table 8), and that these will be kept under review throughout the budget process.

4. To approve the initial budget virements for 2024-25 as set out in Appendix 1, reflecting budget transfers for whole services between departments as a result of the Employment Committee of 18 March 2024, while noting the virements do not change the overall Council Budget.

13. Background Papers

- 13.1. Background papers relevant to this report include:

[Norfolk County Council Revenue and Capital Budget 2024-25 to 2027-28, County Council 20/02/2024, agenda item 5](#)

[Better Together, for Norfolk](#)

[Corporate Delivery Plan and Corporate Delivery Plan – Annual Report 2022-2023, Cabinet 10/05/2023, agenda item 11](#)

[Risk Management, Cabinet 08/04/2024, agenda item 15](#)

[Norfolk County Council Climate Strategy](#)

Officer Contact

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If you need this report in large print, audio, braille, alternative format or in a different language please contact 0344 800 8020 or 0344 800 8011 (textphone) and we will do our best to help.

Appendix 1 – 2024-25 Budget reconciliation

The following tables provide a summary of the adjustments between the Net Budget position presented to County Council in February 2024, and the Net Budget position arising from the Employment Committee of 18 March 2024 which will form the basis for 2024-25 monitoring in future reporting to Cabinet. These adjustments **do not change the overall County Council Budget for 2024-25**.

	Adult Social Services £m	Children's Services £m	CES £m	Communities and Environment £m	Infrastructure £m	Fire and Rescue £m	Strategy and Transformation £m	Chief Executive's Directorate £m	Finance £m	Total £m
Net Budget 2024-25 as per Full Council February 2024	281.967	238.592	203.268	-	-	-	30.184	4.384	-230.646	527.748
Adjustments										
Communities and Environment			-20.896	20.896						0.000
Infrastructure			-145.047		145.047					0.000
Fire			-36.017			36.017				0.000
Procurement			-1.308						1.308	0.000
Total 2024-25 c/f below	281.967	238.592	-	20.896	145.047	36.017	30.184	4.384	-229.339	527.748

Net Budget	Adult Social Services £m	Children's Services £m	Communities and Environment £m	Infrastructure £m	Fire and Rescue £m	Strategy and Transformation £m	Chief Executive's Directorate £m	Finance £m	Total £m
2024-25 (adjusted)	281.967	238.592	20.896	145.047	36.017	30.184	4.384	-229.339	527.748
2025-26	294.360	251.497	22.207	149.839	36.590	32.310	4.919	-201.464	590.258
2026-27	311.305	255.582	23.170	154.245	37.583	33.087	5.177	-167.086	653.064
2027-28	331.350	261.536	24.043	159.375	38.605	34.232	5.320	-139.684	714.778

The above table represents the “do nothing” scenario in relation to the MTFS position approved by County Council in February 2024. In other words, it shows the impact of forecast cost pressures for the period to 2027-28, reconciled to the new departmental structure approved by Employment Committee. In practice, additional savings will need to be developed through the 2025-26 Budget process and incorporated into the above MTFS to deliver a balanced budget position.

Scrutiny Committee

Item No: 9

Report Title: Quarterly update on Children's and Adult Social Care Performance Review Panels.

Date of Meeting: 22 May 2024

Responsible Cabinet Member: Cllr Karen Vincent (Deputy Cabinet Member for Children's Services) & Cllr Shelagh Gurney (Deputy Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care).

Responsible Director: Debbie Bartlett, (Interim Executive Director for Adult Social Services) & Sara Tough, (Executive Director for Children's Services).

Executive Summary

This report outlines progress to date with regards to the ongoing activity of the two Performance Review Panels (PRPs), one for Adult Social Care and one for Children's Services. Members will receive updates on recent work undertaken, key actions, updates on actions from scrutiny, and an overview of the forward programmes of work for the panels.

Recommendations

The committee is asked to:

1. Note progress and activity from the two performance review panels, providing feedback and recommendations where appropriate.
2. Note the panel forward work programmes, providing feedback to the panel leadership around potential items for further investigation.

1. Background and Purpose

- 1.1 At the Scrutiny Committee meeting held on the 21 July 2021 members considered the item 'Establishment of Children's and Adult Social Services Performance Review Panels'. The full report and associated minutes can be found [here](#).

- 1.2 Following discussion, the committee resolved to note the proposed Terms of Reference and the operating principles/membership of the two panels, as well as agreeing to disband the previous Children's Services Scrutiny Sub-Panel.
- 1.3 It was also agreed that there should be an ongoing reporting schedule between the panels and the Scrutiny Committee
- 1.4 This report serves as the seventh update to the Scrutiny Committee, allowing members the opportunity to discuss progress and feed into panel development and work programming.

2. Performance Review Panels – Membership and Approach

- 2.1 The Performance Review Panels are responsible for monitoring and providing challenge to Norfolk County Council's Children's/Adult Social Services functions, reviewing performance to improve service delivery.
- 2.2 The panels meet in private, though are tasked with updating regularly and publicly with the Scrutiny Committee. They have the authority to commission reports and request data from the relevant service areas, and may make recommendations to the Cabinet Member and senior officers.
- 2.3 The panels are chaired by the relevant Deputy Cabinet Member, with wider membership nominated by group leaders according to the following political composition:
3 Conservative (inc. Chair), 1 Labour, 1 Liberal Democrat.
- 2.4 Membership of the panels is as below:

Adult Social Care PRP

- Cllr Shelagh Gurney (Chair)
- Cllr Mark Kiddle-Morris
- Cllr Sharon Blundell
- Cllr Brenda Jones
- *Vacancy*

Children's Services PRP

- Cllr Karen Vincent (Chair)
- Cllr Brian Long
- Cllr Vic Thomson
- Cllr Mike Smith-Clare
- Cllr John Crofts

3. Update on Actions from the Scrutiny Committee

3.1 There are no outstanding actions from the Scrutiny Committee.

4. Children's Services Performance Review Panel

4.1 At each meeting, the Children's Services PRP receives a broad update on vital signs performance indicators, as well as a deep dive into a specific performance indicator.

4.2 Since the last update to the Scrutiny Committee on the 12 December 2023 the Children's Services Performance Review Panel has met on two occasions:

- 23 January 2024
- 19 March 2024

4.3 Minutes from PRP meetings occasionally contain sensitive information so haven't been appended. These are however, available upon request.

4.4 An outline of discussions and actions from each of the meetings can be found below.

Tuesday 23 January 2024

4.5 On Tuesday 23 January the panel received a broad paper on Children's Services Vital Signs, which provided an overview of performance indicators with a commentary where performance was above or below the expected level.

4.6 Members and officers discussed the following areas with relation to the report:

- The percentage of children achieving a positive Early Years outcome in Norfolk had increased by 0.1% over November 2023's figures to 67.4%, keeping the country broadly in line with the national figure of 67.2%.
- GCSE exam data, with the first cohort now comparable with pre-covid data-sets. Members noted that GCSE results in Norfolk were 1% below the national average, and that the percentage of SEND support students achieving a standard pass in English and Maths had declined since 2019. Members discussed the data in detail and provided challenge around individual cohorts.

- The percentage of Care Leavers between the ages of 19 and 21 who were in Employment, Education and Training (EET) had increased to 63.4%, as opposed to the target of 52%. Members discussed current targets, the manner in which these were set, and whether a more ambitious target might be appropriate.
- The rate of Looked-After Children per 10,000 of the overall 0-17 population remained on red, with performance at 69.9% against the target of 62.3%. Members challenged performance, and discussed local and national trends. As part of discussions members noted that an update on Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker Children was expected at a meeting of the panel scheduled for March 2024.
- Anomalies in data regarding recurrent referrals into social within 12 months of a previous referral. Members discussed performance and the reporting cycle for data.
- Increases in the average time between NCC receiving court authority to place a child and deciding on a match to an adoptive family. This had increased to 147 days, though was still significantly below the target of 221 days. Members discussed shortages in the number of potential adoptive families.
- Members were presented with a full calendar year of EHCP data and analysed ongoing challenges and performance.
- Members discussed the remit of the panel, particularly with regards to financial scrutiny. While statistics and performance data was reported to the Performance Review Panel, information relating to ongoing budget assessments against targets in Children's Services was not available. Clarification was requested as to whether financial information was reported to the Cabinet Member for Children's Services or the Cabinet Member for Finance as portfolio holder. There had been a budget overspend in the department and it was unknown whether this data should be relayed to the Panel for scrutiny against performance targets. It was agreed that the Chair would take away an action to discuss appropriate financial challenge with the Cabinet Member for Children's Services.

4.7 Members further received an update on areas for development from the inspection of Norfolk Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS). Officers introduced the report, which provided analysis of three key areas which were identified in the November 2022 Ofsted inspection of Children's Services as "requiring development", and how the department had responded to develop necessary improvements. Data was now available to

show the progress and impact of the measures taken by officers. The three priority areas identified were as follows:

- The practice response to children aged 16 and 17 who presented as homeless.
- The recognition of, and response to children who were experiencing neglect over a prolonged period of time.
- Decision-making, practice, and support to children placed within their family and friends networks, which also ensured that carers were well supported and regulatory requirements were consistently met.

4.8 Members and officers discussed the following areas with relation to the report.

- Challenges related to effective data collection with regards to the number of 16-17 yr olds presenting as homeless. While data was not available to inspectors at the time of inspection, a list had now been collated through various other sources and a dashboard had been pulled together.
- Members discussed the NCC approach to supporting 16-17 yr olds presenting as homeless, including identification of those requiring support, services delivered to those at risk of harm or neglect, and work with partners such as district authorities and charities such as YMCA and the MAP network. Members specifically discussed the practice guide and protocol put together to help staff work with partners to recognise and rectify issues.
- Officers discussed future training on the topic of support to homeless young people to be delivered to NCC staff which was planned for April 2024.
- Work to reduce cases of persistent neglect. This was identified as a key area requiring greater focus. Inspectors were satisfied that cases of acute neglect were handled effectively, but raised concerns around re-referrals. Members discussed plans to reduce persistent neglect, alongside the work of the Neglect Practice Group and Neglect Champions across the organisation. Members were particularly pleased to hear that the number of neglect champions had increased from 11 to 302.

- Members discussed the introduction of a family help multi-disciplinary pilot, designed to enable family practitioners and social workers liaise effectively, supporting targeted early intervention in neglect cases. Members queried how neglect cases might come to the attention of the local authority, particularly with regards to third parties such as schools. Members heard how efforts were made to create a systemwide, multi-agency approach to ensure consistency, and discussed the potential benefits of using technology to enable a swifter and more joined-up response.
- Members discussed the development of new training materials and briefings on the topic of neglect to support development of staff, and were briefed on the developing work of the newly established operational oversight forum.
- Family arrangements was identified as an area requiring further oversight. The Ofsted inspection highlighted that Norfolk County Council exhaustively worked towards keeping children with their families, which was considered the best practice for children given evidence. However, there was a lack of confidence that families were being correctly informed about their circumstances and responsibilities. Members discussed efforts to improve communication with families within current regulations and national expectations. Members also received an update on activity to strengthen guidance related to temporarily approved foster carers.

Tuesday 19 March 2024

4.9 Members received an overview of Children’s Services vital signs performance indicators with a commentary where performance was above or below the expected level. Areas discussed by officers and members included:

- The percentage of schools judged good or outstanding by Ofsted had reached the 86% target during January 2024, for the first time on record. The percentage of special and secondary schools judged good or outstanding remained above the national average. Members discussed performance trends, and focused on primary school education where a significant number of schools were still rated as requires improvement.
- Improvements in the percentage of care leavers who were in Employment, Education or Training (EET).

- The percentage of family support referrals who previously had a referral in the previous 12 months had increased to 14.6% in January 2024. This was higher than previous months but remained below the 15% target for this indicator. Members discussed activity to reduce this number, including early outcomes from a Family Help pilot scheme in West Norfolk.
- The percentage of children beginning a child protection plan who previously been subject to a child protection plan continued to improve, with the January 2024 data showing this had decreased to 7.6% as opposed to the 11% target for this indicator.
- Children's Services continued to see strong demand for Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs), with the data for January showing a marked increase in requests compared to the same period in 2023. Members discussed ongoing efforts to improve NCC performance around EHCPs.
- Officers provided members with a presentation regarding the proposed refresh of Children's Services Vital Signs performance measures.

4.10 Members further received a deep-dive briefing on activity to decrease the rate of Looked-After Children per 10,000 of 0-17 population. Members and officers discussed the following areas with relation to the report:

- Officers acknowledged that Children's Services was consistently missing its performance target of 62.3% for this indicator. There had been a significant increase in the number of unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) coming into Norfolk, with the data illustrating a significant increase in the rate of looked-after children from mid-2022 onwards, up to 70-71%. This level had been maintained for the majority of 2023; however there were now signs this rate was about to decrease, as the overall number of looked-after children in Norfolk was now declining.
- As of the 26 February 2024, there were 1,170 looked-after children overall, with 169 being UASC.
- Members discussed positive trends with regards to non-UASC looked-after children had been identified, with the numbers per 10,000 reducing to 58.8 in 2023. This was within the target of 62.3. Norfolk was performing well compared to statistical neighbours and the national average. Members discussed performance, and activity taking place that had led to the fall in numbers.

- 93.3% of statutory visits for UASC were completed within timescale in January 2024, which was similar to the overall looked-after population. Officers commented this was area of performance that the service was focusing on improving. There was evidence suggesting that this cohort reacted very positively to engagement from the team.
- Members heard an update from officers around planned health assessments, given it was likely those in the UASC cohort had never received health support previously and certainly not in their journey to the UK. It was imperative that their needs be understood and met. 90.1% of health assessments were completed in the target timescale in January 2024, the figure regularly fluctuating around this percentage. The service had also seen strong performance in ensuring the UASC cohort had dental checks within timescale.
- Officers acknowledged that mental health was a major challenge for looked-after children. Evidence suggested the UASC cohort appeared to have fewer mental health issues than locally looked-after children. Research into this suggested that many in this cohort came from loving family units before they travelled to the UK. Because of this background, UASC appeared to have a different resilience to trauma if their needs were met back at home before they reached the UK. The service was vigilant towards signs of mental health problems, along with other health issues which could cause a deterioration in mental health. Dedicated UASC providers had a large wealth of experience in this area. The Chair asked if support services were offered to colleagues in Children's Services, given they would experience trauma from listening to the experiences of looked-after children. An officer confirmed there was a dedicated psychotherapist who also worked with staff, offering a reflective space to them. The team also hosted reflection events to ensure team members could come together and share experiences.
- There were issues with availability of education for the UASC cohort in Norfolk, with recruitment and capacity being the main reasons. The service was working closely with providers to support those in the looked-after cohort into further education elsewhere in Norfolk.
- Members discussed the employment of a number of specialists within Children's services – including a housing and immigration lead.

- Members and officers discussed what effective support to this cohort from central government might look like. Officers noted that a renewed focus on educational provision would be welcome, particularly swifter access to English as a second or additional language.
- Members thanked officers for facilitating the discussion and agreed to take away an action to explore opportunities to present the stories and data they'd received to a wider audience of councillors.

5. Adult Social Care Performance Review Panel

- 5.1 The Deputy Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care, Public Health and Prevention has agreed, alongside the panel, a forward programme of work and schedule of meetings for the Adult Social Care Performance Review Panel through until April 2024.
- 5.2 Since the last update to the Scrutiny Committee the Adult Social Care Performance Review Panel has met on two occasions.
- 19 January 2024
 - 16 April 2024
- 5.3 This report updates members on activity discussed at the January meeting of the panel. Members will receive an update on the April meeting in the next update expected in July. There were no actions received for the Scrutiny Committee at this meeting.
- 5.4 Minutes from PRP meetings occasionally contain sensitive information so haven't been appended. These are however, available upon request.

Friday 19 January 2024

- 5.5 Members received an update on HR & Workforce issues for Adult Social Care. The following areas were raised in discussion of the report.
- Members noted and discussed workforce highlights, the workforce strategy and plan. In addition, members were provided with an overview of recruitment data, and activity to meet challenges in the market. This included a discussion around international recruitment.
 - Members discussed partnership work with the DWP to support those who are currently unemployed into careers with NCC.

- The issue of keyworker staff housing in North Norfolk was raised. Members broadly discussed keyworker housing schemes, and their rules surrounding governance, access and operation.
- Members discussed work taking place to encourage younger people in Norfolk to consider a career in care with NCC. Officers updated the panel on efforts to develop an effective relationship with the Health and Social Care Panel, and the low uptake of recent taster days. The committee suggested that greater communication with post-16 education providers should be prioritised to increase attendance at future open days.
- Officers provided members with an update on mandatory training at NCC, and the priorities outlined in the learning and development plan.
- The issue of MyOracle was raised, and members questioned officers on the impact on the service, and the corporate response to issues surrounding missing or incorrect payments to staff.
- Members advised that some constituents had highlighted that they found it challenging to communicate effectively with some international workers due to language barriers, specifically a person's accent if English was not their first language. It was confirmed that all social workers are required to have an English qualification and must be able to talk and write English confidently and sufficiently. It was noted by officers that international recruitment was led by the Government to help lessen the social care recruitment crisis. A language barrier may occur when there was a genuine barrier such as hearing loss, or if someone found a particular accent difficult to understand. Other incidents of language barriers may be due to attitudes and beliefs towards international workers and ethnic minority employees. International workers had shared through feedback that they experience significant racism at work. How NCC manages these types of situations was important, to ensure that all workers felt safe, valued and protected at work. For people experiencing genuine language barriers, these would need to be addressed appropriately. Officers agreed to take an action away to develop guidance that members could draw on when asked what to do when a service user was experiencing language barriers.

5.6 Members further received an update on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion within Adult Social Care. The following points were raised by members and officers as part of the discussion.

- The Panel received a broad update on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) within Adult Social Care, and a specific update on work being carried out within Adult Social Services to respond to a peer review that took place in 2022. The findings of the peer review highlighted key areas for improvement.
- A clear priority set out in the review was awareness across the service of EDI priorities. Members received an update from officers around activity to strengthen knowledge and build confidence amongst staff.
- Members further heard around efforts in place to reduce incidents of racism – and the early stages of an action to address concerns as a priority.
- Panel members agreed to maintain oversight of activity taking place to address priorities set out in the peer review.

6. Work Programming

- 6.1 The Performance Review Panel terms of Reference set out a clear work programming relationship with Scrutiny. While the panels are responsible for setting their own work programmes, the Scrutiny committee may suggest additional topics for the Panels to consider.
- 6.2 Please note, that as with the Scrutiny Committee forward work programme, all of the below are subject to change, adapting to pressures as needed.

Children’s Performance Review Panel

The following plan has been agreed:

May 24	EHCP peaks – narrative and drivers/An overview of CS vital signs performance indicators
July 24	ASC referrals and trends over time/An overview of CS vital signs performance indicators
September 24	An overview of CS vital signs performance indicators

Adult’s Performance Review Panel

The following plan has been agreed:

May 24	Forensic mental health support
July 24	Nothing currently scheduled
September 24	Nothing currently scheduled

The above is subject to change, depending on the timeframe/outcome of a likely CQC inspection of Norfolk County Council ASC services.

7. Action plan

7.1 The below is a summary of current and outstanding actions arising as a result of the panels. It includes significant actions from the last three meetings of each panel, with an indication of both the action owner and progress to date. The tracker will be updated over time, with the Scrutiny Committee kept up to date on key recommendations and actions from the panel.

Date	Action/Recommendation	Owner	Update
Children's Services PRP (CS PRP)			
27/03/2023	The Panel Reviewed, Commented on, supported and challenged the performance of Children's Services as it related to the provision of appropriate care placements for looked after children.	CS PRP	Completed
	A follow up report requested on Ofsted thematic audits and outcomes.	CS PRP	Completed
	A future deep dive review was requested on post 16 exploitation.	Children's Services	Completed
	Future reports to provide data on looked after children with clearer distinction of support provided to Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker Children.	Children's Services	Completed.
	A future deep dive scheduled to look at Ks2 data.	Children's Services	Completed – deep dive considered by committee in September 23.
13/07/2023	The Panel Reviewed, Commented on, supported and challenged the performance of Children's Services broadly, with a specific discussion around elective home education in Norfolk.	CS PRP	Completed, with feedback provided to officers.
	Requested that a member briefing around the work of the elective Home Education team should be arranged for members.	Elective Home Education Team/Committee Support Team	Completed, member briefing session delivered in October.

18/09/2023	Panel members requested that future updates on care leavers who are in EET/NEET include broader narrative to support effective challenge.	Children's Services	Completed
	<p>The panel requested that the following previous deep dive papers be circulated to members for questions and comments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - percentage of cases with a current exploitation risk level which is below the original level of risk recorded at initial screening, - percentage of Care Leavers who are in Education, Employment or Training (EET). 	Committee team	Completed
	The Panel Reviewed, Commented on, supported and challenged the performance of Children's Services broadly, with a specific discussion around Ks2 outcomes.	CS PRP	Completed
	Members requested that an update on learning ambitions Ks2 be scheduled for a future meeting of the panel.	Children's Services	Completed – Update received in March 24
16/11/2023	The Panel Reviewed, Commented on, supported and challenged the performance of Children's Services with regards to vital signs.	CS PRP	Completed
	<p>The Panel identified the following areas to be investigated further in future deep dives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -The number of looked-after children and unaccompanied asylum seekers in Norfolk. -Referrals into social care and trends in reporting over time. -Peaks in EHCP requests to better understand underlying drivers and narrative. 	Children's Services	<p>Partially complete</p> <p>UASC item considered in March 24.</p> <p>Discussions ongoing to appropriately place additional items over the course of the next two meetings.</p>
	The Panel commented and reviewed analysis of permanent exclusions and alternative provision in Norfolk.	CS PRP	Completed

	The Panel considered the effectiveness and appropriateness of support, challenge, and the development of new provision under Local First inclusion.	CS PRP	Completed
	The Panel requested that an all-member briefing be delivered on the topic of permanent exclusions and alternative provision.	Children's Services	To be scheduled
23/01/2024	The Panel resolved to review and comment on Children's Services performance against the Vital Signs Measures. Panel Members agreed that no additional items required a deep dive at present.	CS PRP	Completed
	The Panel resolved to review the actions taken by Norfolk County Council's Children's Services in relation to the areas identified by Ofsted for development, and their effectiveness on impacting positively on the lives of children and young people.	CS PRP	Completed
19/03/2024	The Panel resolved to review and comment on Children's Services performance against the Vital Signs Measures.	CS PRP	Completed
	Members commented on, questioned and challenged officers around performance with relation to the number of looked after children per 10,000 of the 0-17 population, with particular focus on the UASC cohort. Members discussed how best to share the work of Children's Services in this area with a broader audience of members. This could include taking the item to a future meeting of the People and Communities Select Committee.	CS PRP	Completed
Adult Social Care PRP (ASC PRP)			
18/04/2023	Panel members discussed the report and challenged the service around assurance preparation, with a clear focus on readiness for inspection	ASC PRP	Completed, with feedback provided to officers.
	Members requested that an update be provided at a future meeting on the work that is being undertaken to address the issues identified in the regional self-assessment tool.	ASC PRP/Adult Social Services	Completed

20/06/2023	Members thanked officers for the organisation and delivery of a visit to Swallowtail Place – an assisted living scheme in Acle.	ASC PRP	Completed
	Members worked with officers to outline expectations for a future workshop session with service users.	ASC PRP	Completed – 1:1 engagement activity is currently being scoped and delivered by social care colleagues.
03/10/23	Members requested that feedback provided around the frontline experience of councillors supported vulnerable residents in their community be shared with colleagues working on wider system transformation.	Adult Social Services	Completed
	Information around 'Right Care, Right Person' to come back to a future meeting, with wider communications around progress shared with the broader membership of the council.	Adult Social Services	Ongoing
19/01/2024	Officers agreed to develop guidance that members could draw on when asked what to do when a service user was experiencing language barriers.	Adult Social Services	Ongoing
	A further update on Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion within Adult Social Care to be received by the panel later in the year	AS PRP	Not yet scheduled

8. Resource Implications

8.1 **Staff:** None identified

8.2 **Property:** None identified

8.3 **IT:** None identified

9. Other Implications

9.1 **Legal Implications:** None identified

9.2 **Human Rights Implications:** None identified

9.3 **Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) (this must be included):** N/A

9.4 Data Protection Impact Assessments (DPIA): N/A

9.5 Health and Safety implications (where appropriate): N/A

9.6 Sustainability implications (where appropriate): N/A

9.7 Any Other Implications: None identified

10. Risk Implications / Assessment

10.1 N/A

11. Select Committee Comments

11.1 No specific comments, though the panel are able to refer matters to the Select Committee where appropriate, as set out in the PRP Terms of Reference.

12. Recommendations

To:

1. Note progress and activity from the two performance review panels, providing feedback and recommendations where appropriate.
2. Note the panel forward work programmes, providing feedback to the panel leadership around potential items for further investigation.

13. Background Papers

13.1 None

Officer Contact

If you have any questions about matters contained within this paper, please get in touch with:

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Scrutiny Committee

Item No: 10

Report Title: Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme

Date of Meeting: 22 May 2024

Executive Summary

This paper sets out the current forward work programme for the Scrutiny Committee, outlining committee dates and agreed items.

Recommendations

Members of the committee are asked to:

1. Note the current Scrutiny Committee forward work programme and discuss potential further items for future consideration.

1. Background and Purpose

- 1.1 Members of the Scrutiny Committee took part in a work programming session held on the 22 April 2023, discussing proposed items for the Committee to consider through until May 2024.
- 1.2 The work programme attached is amended frequently to better reflect officer pressures and changes to the Cabinet forward plan of decisions.
- 1.3 All topics are subject to change, with the committee remaining flexible to ensure the ability to adapt to emerging and urgent topics for consideration.

2. Proposal

- 2.1 Members are asked to note the attached forward programme of work (**Appendix A**) and discuss potential further items for consideration.

3. Impact of the Proposal

- 3.1 Maintaining the proposed work programme will ensure that the Scrutiny Committee has a full schedule of work, and officers are well prepared to present to the committee.

4. Financial Implications

- 4.1 None

5. Resource Implications

5.1 Staff:

None

5.2 Property:

None

5.3 IT:

None

6. Other Implications

6.1 Legal Implications:

None

6.2 Human Rights Implications:

None

6.3 Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) (this must be included):

None

6.4 Data Protection Impact Assessments (DPIA):

None

6.5 Health and Safety implications (where appropriate):

None

6.6 Sustainability implications (where appropriate):

None

6.7 Any Other Implications:

None

7. Risk Implications / Assessment

7.1 None

8. Select Committee Comments

8.1 None

9. Recommendations

Members of the Scrutiny Committee are asked to:

1. Note the Scrutiny Committee forward work programme and discuss potential further items for future consideration.

10. Background Papers

10.1 **Appendix A** – Scrutiny Committee Forward Programme of Work

Officer Contact

If you have any questions about matters contained within this paper, please get in touch with:

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Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme

Appendix A

Date	Report	Further notes/Comments	Better Together for Norfolk - Strategic Goal(s)*	Cabinet Member	Lead Officer
22/05/24	Norwich to Tilbury Pylons – feedback on Consultation	Pre-scrutiny item	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Strategic and Financial Planning 2025-26	Standard budget setting item	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>A Vibrant and Sustainable Economy</i> - <i>Better Opportunities for Children and Young People</i> - <i>Healthy, Fulfilling and Independent Lives</i> - <i>Strong, Engaged and Inclusive Communities</i> - <i>A Greener, More Resilient Future</i> 	Cllr Andrew Jamieson, Cabinet Member for Finance	Harvey Bullen, Director of Strategic Finance

	Performance Review Panels – Quarterly Update	Standard quarterly item	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Better Opportunities for Children and Young People - Healthy, Fulfilling and Independent Lives 	<p>Cllr Alison Thomas, Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care</p> <p>&</p> <p>Cllr Penny Carpenter, Cabinet Member for Children’s Services</p>	<p>Debbie Bartlett, Executive Director of Adult Social Care</p> <p>&</p> <p>Sarah Tough, Executive Director of Children’s Services</p>
19/06/24	Minimum Income Guarantee	Pre-scrutiny item	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Healthy, Fulfilling and Independent Lives 	Cllr Alison Thomas, Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care	Debbie Bartlett, Executive Director of Adult Social Care

The ‘Better Together for Norfolk – County Council Strategy 2021-25**’ outlines five strategic priorities. These are:*

- *A Vibrant and Sustainable Economy*
- *Better Opportunities for Children and Young People*
- *Healthy, Fulfilling and Independent Lives*
- *Strong, Engaged and Inclusive Communities*
- *A Greener, More Resilient Future*

When scheduling items for the work programme the committee should consider, where applicable, the item contributes to the above strategic goals and overall delivery of the County Council’s strategy for 2021-25.