

Cabinet
3 June 2024
Public & Local Member Questions

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| | Public Question Time |
| 6.1 | <p>Question from John Martin</p> <p>By what amounts, respectively, do the sums of (a) £46.118m (b) £50.156m and (c) £68.991m set out at paragraph 6.10.2 of the officers' report to the Cabinet meeting on 4 December 2023 in relation to the Norwich Western Link project require to be adjusted to take into account the relevant early termination payments due to Ferrovial Construction (UK) Ltd under the building contract dated 12 July 2021? (I am mindful that when the Saddlebow waste incinerator project was scrapped, the Council faced termination costs of over £33m.)</p> <p>Response from the Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport</p> <p>Cabinet and Full Council agreed to award the contract for the Norwich Western Link project in June 2021. In that report it was highlighted that:</p> <p>“It should be noted that by entering into the contract, NCC is not obliged to continue to the next stages of the contract, and during Stage One would only be paying the project development fees incurred by the contractor.”</p> <p>This has not changed, and there are no penalties for not progressing to stage 2 (construction) of the contract with Ferrovial Construction Ltd.</p> <p>Supplementary question from John Martin</p> <p>Eight months ago, the DfT confirmed a grant of £213m on the basis of the OBC and subject to conditions. Since then the Cabinet has stated several times that this figure may be greatly increased, even to the extent of covering the whole of the final cost of the project. (The present estimated cost is £274m.) Does the Cabinet still believe this and, if so, what is the basis for that belief?</p> <p>Response from the Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport</p> <p>The Outline Business Case approval letter provided by DfT in October 2023 set out that:</p> <p>“The Prime Minister’s announcement of Network North on 4th October included provision for increased funding for most existing Major Road Network and Large Local Major road schemes. These schemes, subject to successful business case approval, could benefit from an uplift in government contribution of their costs based on the Outline Business Case stage. We are currently considering the details of how this will apply to schemes and I will write to you again with further information on this, and details of any increase in the Department’s contribution, once the position is clear.”</p> |

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| | <p>This provides a clear indication that funding from Department for Transport (DfT) could be increased to reflect the full Outline Business Case value, which at that stage was £251m. This has not changed, however the guidance from DfT regarding Network North funding is still awaited.</p> <p>This was set out in the report to Cabinet in December 2023:</p> <p>“DfT have agreed to grant funding of £24.815 million in the current financial year (2023/24) following the OBC decision. In addition, it has also indicated that funding of up to 100% of the NWL (based on the OBC submission of £251.1m) is possible. This is subject to further guidance and agreement with DfT, which is yet to be provided.”</p> |
| 6.2 | <p>Question from Alex Catt</p> <p>With the increasing threat of the climate crisis, many people are looking for those ways in which they can make a personal difference, but we know that the best way to reduce emissions is system-wide change. Many people find it difficult to make the switch an electric vehicle because there is no cheap and easy option for EV charging for those without off-road parking. Plans to install public charging stations is a small step in the right direction but this is still inconvenient and costly, making this switch prohibitive. Will the cabinet explore accessible solutions for at-home EV charging, looking at schemes such as Kurbo Charge or Gul-e?</p> |
| | <p>Response from the Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste</p> <p>Norfolk County Council adopted an Electric Vehicle strategy in 2021 which recognises that electric vehicles will play an important part in achieving our ambitious target for carbon neutrality. In this strategy we recognised that a key barrier to the uptake of electric vehicles is a lack of suitable charging infrastructure. To address this, we are working with the private sector who wish to deliver publicly available charging infrastructure in residential areas which focuses on providing the right solution in the right location.</p> <p>We have considered emerging technical solutions for home charging cables such as those you mention as part of this. However, once installed ongoing maintenance and inspection by the County Council would be required and should the homeowner sell or move then liability for removal and reinstatement of the footway would fall to the Highway Authority. Therefore, these are not options which we are currently considering.</p> |
| | <p>Supplementary question from Alex Catt</p> <p>The current policy on licences for at-home EV charging is still preventing many from making the switch to an electric vehicle as public charging points can be expensive and inconvenient, especially for specific groups in society, with some residents having licence applications rejected despite efforts to find solutions for at-home parking which does not involve any safety risks to those using the highway. Will the cabinet look again at this policy?</p> |

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| | Response from the Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste <p>The County Council has developed a fair but robust Electric Vehicle Charging Cable licencing process. This includes comprehensive assessment criteria as we were clear from the start that a proliferation of charging cables and differing standards of protection would not be welcome by residents and other highway users including those who use mobility aids to travel. We have struck a balanced approach that addresses the needs of residents alongside the roll out of public residential charge points. Where public charge points are installed or are going to be installed, we feel it right to limit the licencing of charging cables in that area but will always consider each case on its merits. We have worked with the providers of public charge points to ensure that they are accessible to all user groups.</p> <p>Where cable licences are granted, we require cable protection to be provided when they are in use and removed when not. This is a cost-effective solution for residents that does not require a permanent installation and has minimal impact on other highway users.</p> |

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| | Local Member Question Time |
| 7.1 | Question from Cllr Brian Watkins |
| | The latest announcement from the Conservative Government to reintroduce National Service would see £1.5bn diverted away from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund from 2028. This announcement is concerning, comes without consultation and will surely be a detriment to the country's, and Norfolk's, long-term levelling-up ambitions. Can the leader reassure residents that this policy will not be to the detriment of the levelling-up of Norfolk, and what repercussions could the ending of this fund have for our long-term plans? |
| | Response from the Leader and Cabinet Member for Strategy and Governance |
| | The levelling up of Norfolk is being pursued under a devolution deal, which is a bespoke arrangement with Government and will bring in £600m for the County to target Norfolk's own priorities, including investing in the skills we need and attracting and retaining key businesses. We remain positive that the next Government will want to honour this additional commitment to Norfolk, its residents and businesses. |
| | Second question from Cllr Brian Watkins |
| 7.2 | It is welcome to see this council looking at ways to maximise its income to offset potential cuts to services, the move by some of our district councils to introduce a windfall tax on second homes obviously has financial benefits for our own coffers. However, there are obstacles to this, can the Cabinet Member identify why some districts are against introducing this windfall tax? |
| | Response from the Cabinet Member for Finance |
| | I do not believe that it is appropriate for me to respond on behalf of the District Councils on this matter. |
| 7.2 | Question from Cllr Dan Roper |
| | The Cabinet Members for Environment & Waste and Highways Infrastructure & Transport recently received an email from St Faiths Parish Council highlighting concerns about peak time queues, traffic management and inconvenience for residents at the North Norwich recycling centre. Indeed, on occasions it is reported that the traffic queue has impacted on traffic using the A140 roundabout for the Broadland Northway. Could the Cabinet Members please outline what action will be taken to address these concerns. |
| | Response from the Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport |
| | An email has been received from Horsham & Newton St. Faiths Parish Council which has highlighted concerns relating to traffic congestion in the vicinity of the North Norwich recycling centre. I can confirm that this matter is being reviewed by both highways and waste officers to establish whether there are reasonable measures that can be put in place to mitigate the concerns raised, in the interim, until a booking |

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| | system is introduced later this year. In addition, our site operators have already provided extra staff and signage to improve traffic flow and reduce queuing times. |
| 7.3 | <p>Question from Cllr Rob Colwell</p> <p>Since this council changed the policy of weed spraying of verges in 2023 to once a year, as part of a cost cutting exercise, many residents have expressed concern about the scruffy nature of their street or estate. Residents once again are feeling that they are paying more council tax for less services, will the council consider individual requests for a second spray if any initial spray does not suffice?</p> <p>Response from the Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste</p> <p>The weed spraying policy was changed last year with cross party support. The change in policy reduced the amount of weedkiller used on highway by the Council by around 50%, which benefits the environment.</p> <p>The application of weed killer is most effective when there are weeds to spray. As such, the planned annual countywide application will start in June. If, after this treatment has been applied and given time to become effective, weeds are still present, these can be reported to the Council in the usual way. An assessment can then be made to determine whether further remedial action is required.</p> <p>Second question from Cllr Rob Colwell</p> <p>The Queen Elizabeth Hospital has stopped free parking for staff. Local residents have expressed concerns about increased parking in residential areas nearby. Please can the requests of local residents for a consultation on expanding the parking permit area of Springwood be undertaken as soon as possible?</p> <p>Response from the Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport</p> <p>As a Member of the County Council this is a matter which should be raised with your Highways Engineer in the first instance.</p> |
| 7.4 | <p>Question from Cllr David Sayers</p> <p>Given the ruling of the European Court of Human Rights, which establishes that a failure to address climate change adequately violates Article 2 of the European Convention on Human Rights, how does this Cabinet intend to incorporate this legal precedent into NCC's climate action plans and policies and what specific steps will be taken to ensure NCC fulfils its climate obligations while upholding human rights standards?</p> <p>Response from the Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste</p> <p>The court found that the Swiss Government had failed to implement a carbon budget towards limiting its greenhouse gas emissions. As you will know the UK has implemented such a budget as part of its legal commitment to reach net zero by 2050, and the council's policy is to use its powers, influence and partnerships towards supporting the county's low carbon development in line with the UK-wide target and trajectory.</p> <p>Second question from Cllr David Sayers</p> |

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| | <p>I have received numerous concerns from residents concerning rat running along Lynnsport Way, Winter Nellis Way and Marsh Lane. This practice disrupts the community and endangers residents and cyclists. Notably, a young girl was previously knocked over and seriously injured by a vehicle. Given these serious concerns, could you advise on measures the council can take to address this issue and ensure safety? Specifically, what immediate actions can be taken to mitigate these dangers?</p> |
| | <p>Response from the Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport</p> <p>As a Member of the County Council this is a matter which should be raised with your Highways Engineer in the first instance to see if any appropriate measures can be funded through your Local Member Fund.</p> |
| 7.5 | <p>Question from Cllr John Crofts</p> <p>Residents of Pott Row along with my fellow Councillor, Rob Colwell, have been monitoring E. coli levels in water pouring out of manholes in the area since January last year. Locals have recently reported that themselves, family members, and their pets are falling ill, citing E. coli poisoning. Just what does this council intend to do in order to protect the health and wellbeing of Norfolk's residents from serious waterborne illnesses both from an infrastructure and health perspective?</p> |
| | <p>Response from the Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste</p> <p>Thank you for highlighting this issue and sorry to hear of the local issues.</p> <p>This is a matter for Environmental Health in the first instance so I would suggest you request that Cllr Colwell raise this issue with your District Council.</p> |
| 7.6 | <p>Question from Cllr Mike Sands</p> <p>The Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport has now taken to himself all of the decision making powers over roads, since when the number of delays, amounts of disruption and complaints from residents have increased considerably with responses from him that are regarded as complacent and tin eared. Does the Cabinet Member intend to continue to defend everything he does or will he accept his views of his performance are significantly different from many others in the county and take action to improve?</p> |
| | <p>Response from the Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport</p> <p>The Constitution of Norfolk County Council is quite clear that Cabinet Member has always had the authority to make these decisions.</p> <p>There is always the opportunity for Members to be involved in the consultation process, bearing in mind that the Cabinet Member must still make decisions in a timely manner to ensure scheme delivery. In terms of Norwich specifically, Norwich City Council is represented on the Transport for Norwich steering group, along with other relevant groups, which ensures its voice and views are heard.</p> |
| | <p>Supplementary question from Cllr Mike Sands</p> <p>The Transport for Norwich schemes paid for by the Transforming Cities fund that helped create the recent deluge of disruption roadworks in Norwich has brought</p> |

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| | <p>some improvements. Transforming Cities funding was intended to be Transformational. How has the Cabinet Member transformed transport in Norwich rather than just made a few expensive changes?</p> |
| | Response from the Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport |
| | <p>The Transforming Cities fund has been transformational by making significant improvements across Norwich.</p> <p>Highlights include the recently completed Heartsease Roundabout scheme that has transformed that area of the city for people who walk and cycle by making it safer and much easier to navigate, something that has been needed for many, many years.</p> <p>The introduction of the very successful and popular Beryl Bike scheme and the trial of e-scooters has given people more choice of sustainable transport options.</p> <p>The transformation of St Stephens Street with the introduction of sawtooth bus stops has enabled passengers to experience a better waiting environment and has reduced delays to buses.</p> <p>Tombland has been reinvigorated with outdoor seating areas and a reduction of the dominance of vehicular traffic.</p> <p>The bus journey time savings from Transforming Cities schemes has levered in additional investment from both bus operators and the government, which has resulted in the 70 new zero emission electric buses in and around Norwich.</p> <p>These are just some examples with more to come, and when looked at in conjunction with the Bus Service Improvement Plan, the people of Norwich now have more choice of safe and reliable transport options.</p> |
| 7.7 | Question from Cllr Mike Smith-Clare |
| | <p>Can the Cabinet Member for Public Health and Wellbeing confirm what data does Norfolk Public Health have on children who present in primary care settings like GP surgeries with symptoms of malnutrition?</p> |
| | Response from the Cabinet Member for Public Health and Wellbeing |
| | <p>Thank you for your question. As you will know from the Public Health Strategy, Norfolk County Council is working with the NHS to access data in this and other areas to help support the Health Inequality work, which the whole Integrated Care System want to see happen in Norfolk and Waveney. The most recent local child measurement data (2022-23) which is commissioned by Norfolk Public Health and measures heights and weights of ALL children in state schools at Reception and Year 6 shows that 0.8% of Reception children and 1% of Year 6 children are in the category of 'underweight'. This is significantly lower than national averages for both year groups.</p> <p>There are very few NHS admissions for Children and Young People in Norfolk (around 10 per year) recorded with malnutrition. Sadly the causes are largely</p> |

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| | associated with long term conditions, which include childhood cancers, congenital heart disease, cystic fibrosis and cerebral palsy. |
| 7.8 | <p>Question from Cllr Julie Brociek-Coulton</p> <p>Has a condition survey been carried out on the Music House and site of the Jurnet's Bar and what work at what cost will need to be completed before the administration's policy of terminating the repairing lease on those properties can be achieved?</p> <p>Response from the Cabinet Member for Corporate Services and Innovation</p> <p>Norfolk County Council has terminated the lease and returned the property to the freeholder (Norwich City Council). Discussions are ongoing regarding any dilapidations payable.</p> |
| 7.9 | <p>Question from Cllr Chrissie Rumsby</p> <p>Norwich remains an economic powerhouse for the East. Will the Cabinet Member for Economic Growth ensure its potential and status are recognised and retained in the emerging new economic strategy?</p> <p>Response from the Cabinet Member for Economic Growth</p> <p>Thank you for your question.</p> <p>Our new economic strategy is an exciting plan for growth to ensure that all parts of Norfolk – urban and rural – can reach their potential. We have been working with hundreds of stakeholders to develop the strategy which will help businesses from sole traders to multinational businesses.</p> <p>This has included two workshops in every district including Norwich, with businesses, education, the voluntary sector and other stakeholders.</p> <p>The strategy will outline steps to boost skills and bring investment into the county as well as measures to help our existing businesses grow.</p> <p>Norwich as our only city and the capital of Norfolk is of course important to the strategy and myself and the Economic team at the county council will continue to promote and support all the areas of the Norwich economy from the shops and market traders to the new economy areas such as gaming and finance support, but so are Kings Lynn, Great Yarmouth and Thetford, as well as our market towns, our villages and rural areas.</p> <p>Norwich and Norfolk deserve recognition for the financial contribution they make to UK PLC and I hope you will join me in promoting this fact and Norfolk business.</p> |
| 7.10 | <p>Question from Cllr Colleen Walker</p> <p>Despite the Leader's stated intention to get improvements and one off sweeteners to the County Deal for Norfolk, the calling of the General Election and departure of Michael Gove mean there have been no improvements or changes achieved by the Leader. Can she explain why she has been so unsuccessful?</p> <p>Response from the Leader and Cabinet Member for Strategy and Governance</p> |

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| | <p>Improvements to the Devolution Deal already achieved include: a revised election date so we can align with the county council elections in May 2025, extra upfront funding for projects such as the QE Hospital in Kings Lynn, Norwich Western Link funding and the O&M Campus in Great Yarmouth. We have been negotiating several other projects across Norfolk, but no further announcements can be made with the General Election in progress.</p> <p>We remain positive that the next Government will want to honour this additional commitment to Norfolk, its residents and businesses.</p> |
| 7.11 | <p>Question from Cllr Steve Morphew</p> <p>It is now clear COVID-19 recovery funds put into business risk reserves are actually being spent on day to day services which was not ci why government gave the council the money. Can the Cabinet Member for Finance confirm what other earmarked reserves intended for spe fic projects have been diverted to fill day to day spending gaps?</p> <p>Response from the Cabinet Member for Finance</p> <p>Thank you for your question.</p> <p>I do not agree with the assertion that COVID-19 recovery funds have been used for purposes other than they were intended. The Council has applied COVID-19 funding in line with requirements, and the use of this funding has been reported in previous financial years both in the financial monitoring to Cabinet, and in returns to Government.</p> <p>More broadly, the County Council holds earmarked reserves for a range of purposes as detailed within the budget reports to Full Council (see page 225). As part of the annual budget planning process, and ongoing financial monitoring during the year, a detailed review of each of the years within the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS), and planned use of reserves is considered. As I have frequently been on record as stating, despite agreeing a robust and balanced budget for the forthcoming year, reserves are being utilised to ensure that services are maintained. The planned use of reserves is detailed within the Budget papers and in the MTFS approved by Full Council, which shows a planned reduction in non-school general balances and earmarked reserves of 36.72%, from £175.232m in March 2023 to a forecast £110.880m in March 2028. In respect of the 2024-25 Budget, the earmarked reserves and provisions are considered by the Director of Strategic Finance to be adequate and appropriate to reflect the risks they are intended to cover.</p> <p>As part of prudent financial planning, the Council seeks to make contributions to reserves wherever possible as part of the year-end accounts closure process. As reported in the 2023-24 outturn report to Cabinet (page 68), service reserves and provisions (excluding the Dedicated Schools Grant reserve) are £172.636m, subject to any final year end audit adjustments. The additional use of reserves and provisions during 2023-24 to support a balanced outturn position is detailed within the outturn report (see Table 1 on page 74) and amounts to £8.706m. When considering reserves, there is a balance to be struck between ensuring that the Council's reserves and provisions are adequate, while also ensuring that council taxpayers'</p> |

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| | contributions are not held unnecessarily. In this context, it is considered that the Council has adequate financial reserves to manage the delivery of services and the proposed savings in the financial years covered by the approved MTFS. |
| | Supplementary question from Cllr Steve Morpew |
| | Neither the Cabinet Member or Deputy Cabinet Member for Finance attended Scrutiny to allow detailed examination of the budget position for next year despite the date being known well in advance and on the budget timetable approved by Cabinet. That's really not good enough, is it? |
| | Response from the Cabinet Member for Finance |
| | Cllr James attended as a representative of the administration as both myself and Cllr Peck had existing commitments, made before this Scrutiny meeting. |
| 7.12 | Question from Cllr Alexandra Kemp |
| | Access to doctors surgeries in Lynn's deprived town communities, is critical. When St James' Surgery announced plans, in 2015, to move out to affluent South Wootton, the case was established for a replacement town GP surgery. The new Nar Ouse Surgery Hub is being built. It will house physio and maternity outpatients. But the NHS says there will be no doctors. South, West and Town Centre patients now have to travel the tortuous journey across Lynn to Wootton, after St James moved in March. Does Cabinet agree doctors in the hub are essential to tackle Lynn's health inequalities? |
| | Response from the Cabinet Member for Public Health and Wellbeing |
| | Thank you for your question. As you know Norfolk County Council does not have responsibility for NHS primary care services. The provision of this service is the responsibility of the Norfolk and Waveney NHS who I understand have received approval for the business case from NHS England. Of course I fully support easy access to local health services for all of Norfolk's residents. You will see that Norfolk County Council has provided a new bus service that will cover the Primary Care Hub on Nar Ouse Way and the new St James Medical Practice in South Wootton. |