

Cabinet
Minutes of the Meeting held on 08 May 2024
in the Council Chamber, County Hall, at 10am

Present:

Cllr Kay Mason Billig	Chair. Leader and Cabinet Member for Strategy and Governance
Cllr Andrew Jamieson	Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance
Cllr James Bensley	Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste
Cllr Bill Borrett	Cabinet Member for Public Health and Wellbeing
Cllr Margaret Dewsbury	Cabinet Member for Communities and Partnerships
Cllr Fabian Eagle	Cabinet Member for Economic Growth
Cllr Jane James	Cabinet Member for Corporate Services and Innovation
Cllr Graham Plant	Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport

Deputy Cabinet Members Present

Cllr Shelagh Gurney	Deputy Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care
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Executive Directors and Directors Present:

Titus Adam	Assistant Director of Finance
Paul Cracknell	Executive Director of Strategy and Transformation
Kat Hulatt	Director of Legal Services and Monitoring Officer
Tom McCabe	Chief Executive
Ceri Sumner	Director of Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service
Sara Tough	Executive Director of Children's Services

1 Apologies for Absence

- 1.1 Apologies were received from the Cabinet Member for Economic Growth, the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care, and the Cabinet Member for Children's Services.

2 Minutes from the meeting held on 08 April 2024

- 2.1 Cabinet agreed the minutes of the meeting held on Monday, 08 April 2024 as an accurate record.

3 Declaration of Interests

- 3.1 No interests were declared.

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

- 4.1 No matters were referred.

5 Update from the Chair/Cabinet Members

- 5.1 No updates were given.

6. Public Question Time

6.1 The questions received from members of the public and responses to them are published in appendix A of these minutes.

7 Local Member Questions/Issues

7.1 The questions received from Members and responses to them are published in appendix B of these minutes.

8. Council Delivery Plan 2024-5 and Annual Review 2023-4

8.1.1 Cabinet received the report presenting the Council Delivery Plan for 2024-5 as well as the Annual Review for 2023-4, the latter of which illustrated some of the key achievements of the Council during this period.

8.1.2 The Chair introduced the report to Cabinet:

- The Council Delivery Plan set out how the Council's ambitions would be realised.
- The Council's strategic priorities, set out in the Council Delivery Plan, were: achieve a vibrant and sustainable economy; better opportunities for children and young people; healthy, fulfilling, and independent lives; strong, engaged, and inclusive communities and; a greener, more resilient future
- Key activities, priorities and achievements were highlighted.
- The Delivery Plan was reviewed annually, but progress was considered quarterly.
- The Chair highlighted some of the Council's achievements over the past year:
 - Progressing the devolution deal to bring additional powers and funding to the county, ensuring the county could be at the forefront, and the first rural county to accept a devolution deal, if it was agreed by Council in July 2024.
 - Serving over 1.8 million visitors at the 47 libraries in Norfolk
 - Work to reduce carbon emissions by 15%, halving the 2016/2017 baseline.
 - Norfolk County Council's Climate Strategy received national recognition by Climate Emergency UK.
 - Work to improve digital connectivity, delivering ultra-fast broadband to over 6,900 premises and securing over £114m of funding to connect more properties.
 - Work to reduce the backlog of people waiting for care following a hospital stay by 93%.
- All the achievements of the past year had been delivered against the ongoing context of significant financial pressures and increasing demand, particularly for Children's Services and Adult Social Services. Despite these challenges, the local authority had agreed a balanced budget for the financial year 2024-25.
- The Chair said that her first year as Leader had been challenging and rewarding. She thanked Members for supporting her in her role and thanked Cabinet Members for their support.
- The authority had £2bn turnover and supported nearly one million people in Norfolk.

- The Corporate Delivery Plan set out how the Council would support and address challenges and outlined the intention to develop a new Economic Strategy for Norfolk, key infrastructure projects such as the Norwich Western Link, Long Stratton Bypass and improvements to the A47, work to improve digital connectivity and the rollout of project Gigabit. The council would continue to be a leader in flooding initiatives, with a summit at the end of May planned with interested parties.
- The Community Strategy would set out how assets could be used more effectively.
- The Chair thanked staff for all their work supporting residents, delivering value for money and providing an effective organisation.

- 8.2 The Cabinet Member for Public Health and Wellbeing noted that the council was on track to deliver its objectives despite the number of challenges experienced over the past years. Ready to Change would support residents to eat more healthily and become more active. The council had a leadership role in the Integrated Care System and a new Health Inequality Strategy would be brought to the Health and Wellbeing Board soon, aimed at creating conditions for people to live healthy lives. The Cabinet Member for Public Health and Wellbeing noted that the use of technology to support people was a key aspect in supporting the health and wellbeing of people in Norfolk.
- 8.3 The Vice-Chair noted the work being carried out to deliver strategies more cost effectively and that devolution would bring important funding to the council if agreed. In 2024-25, there was a focus on delivery of better quality of affordable and effective care, including more foster carers.
- 8.4 The Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport discussed the increased demand experienced by services while the council worked towards reducing its carbon footprint. Implementing infrastructure projects such as the Norwich Western Link would help people travel freely, deliver housing now and in the future, increase economic development, and invest in technology which would support reducing carbon.
- 8.5 The Cabinet Member for Corporate Services and Innovation discussed the work on digital inclusion which would be expanded with funding from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities.
- 8.6 The Deputy Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care welcomed the report. She hoped that this could be circulated to town and parish councillors for wider awareness. The Chair **agreed** that an email should be sent to town and parish councils with a link to the documents.
- 8.7 The Chair agreed that improving water, road and housing infrastructure would be beneficial, balanced against protecting the countryside and environment. Bringing in new skills and jobs for young people would encourage people to stay in the county. The Chair had met with representatives from South Africa, Ukraine and Normandy who wanted to make links with Norfolk.
- 8.8 Cabinet **RESOLVED** to:
1. Approve the Council Delivery Plan for 2024-5
 2. Agree that the Plan will form the basis of the next Annual Review to be published in May 2025

3. Agree the Annual Review for 2023-4

8.9 Evidence and Reasons for Decision

N/A

8.10 Alternative Options

N/A

9. His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) Inspection of Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service (NFRS)

9.1.1 Cabinet received the report setting out the outcomes from the recent HMICFRS inspection of Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service (NFRS), highlighting the significant progress made, and outlining the subsequent Areas for Improvement (AFI) Action Plan in response to the inspection's findings.

9.1.2 The Cabinet Member for Communities and Partnerships introduced the report to Cabinet:

- Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service had recently been inspected and was now rated Good or Adequate in eight out of eleven categories. The service was no longer a cause for concern regarding prevention. This concern was highlighted during the Covid-19 pandemic when the service considered it unsafe to undertake home safety visits due to the risk of spreading Covid-19. There was no longer a backlog in this area.
- Positive feedback was highlighted around the following themes: prevention, which was now a high priority; values and Culture; finance, as the service was ensuring it was affordable now and, in the future, and; resilience of 24/7 fire safety cover.
- There would be regular reporting on progress towards points in the Action Plan, but it was recommended to do this via the Strategic Development Oversight Group before being brought to Cabinet.

9.2 The Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste recognised the hard work of Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service as a former fire cadet.

9.3 The Chair also recognised their work, noting the importance of the service. She raised the issue of the cost of Personal Protective Equipment for water rescues not being funded by Government; this was increasingly important with flooding increasing over the past years. The Chair had raised this with Government as an issue and that Fire Equipment should be funded appropriately to cover all requirements.

9.4 Cabinet **RESOLVED** to

1. Note the HMICFRS Inspection Report for NFRS ([Effectiveness, efficiency and people 2023–25: An inspection of Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service](#)) and acknowledge the improvements made.
2. Approve the AFI Action Plan and commit to formal reporting of progress into the Strategic Development Oversight Group (Appendix 1 of the report).
3. Endorse the requirements outlined to address the AFI Action Plan: with the 2024/25 cost being funded from Fire reserves, and 2025/26 requirements

considered as part of the 2025/26 Budget process (set out in section 6.1 of the report).

4. Acknowledge the progress made against the HMICFRS culture and values recommendations set out at Appendix 2 of the report.

9.5 Evidence and Reasons for Decision

HMICFRS now requires the Fire and Rescue Authority either to commit to making improvements in all areas identified as Areas for Improvement or provide a rationale for not addressing them.

Additional funding is required for capacity, technology upgrades, and addressing Areas for Improvement to drive improvement.

9.6 Alternative Options

An option is not to address Areas for Improvement or aim to meet within existing resources.

Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service are actively addressing the Areas for Improvement where possible. However, redirecting existing resources will strain already significant workloads and may require deprioritising routine tasks or compromise operations. This could potentially expose Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service to operational and organisational risks. Grey book staff have operational responsibilities that consume a substantial part of their time.

The inability to move forwards ten Areas for Improvement over 3 inspection periods demonstrate the need to properly plan and resource these areas.

10. Climate Action Plans - Tranche 3

10.1.1 Cabinet received the report setting out the third tranche of climate action plans associated with the Norfolk County Council Climate Strategy.

10.1.2 The Chair welcomed Cllr James Bensly to his new role as Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste and thanked Cllr Eric Vardy for his work in this role.

10.1.3 The Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste introduced the report to Cabinet:

- The Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste thanked Cllr Proctor for his previous appointment as Vice Chair of Infrastructure and Development Committee and thanked Cllr Mason Billig for now appointing him as the Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste. He thanked Cllr Eric Vardy for the work he had done when he was in the role.
- The Norfolk County Council Climate Strategy had been taken to Infrastructure and Development Committee and, following approval by Cabinet in May 2023, two tranches of the climate action plans had been approved and published on the Council's website.
- This report introduced the third and final tranche of actions covering commercial and industrial sectors, climate adaptation, transport, council companies and staff and a range of activities from development of the seaweed industry, and bus connectivity to underserved areas.

- The list of actions set out information on how each one would be funded to make clear the commitment to pursuing a financially stable approach.
- Actions would be refreshed annually to give ongoing sight of delivery of the strategy and council could build on its successful approach to climate change which had been recognised in the National 2023 Council climate action scorecard where Norfolk County Council was independently ranked second among UK county councils for its climate action.

10.2 The Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport noted the initiatives set out in the action plan which would reduce the County's carbon footprint such as the seaweed industry, clean hydrogen strategy, and industrial decarbonisation, among others. The council had been successful in receiving government support in the Local Transport Partnerships and through its own initiatives to achieve funding for transport schemes, such as the upgrade of the Norwich bus station with first bus and the walking wheeling and cycling strategy.

10.3 The Vice Chair welcomed the report. The work to reduce carbon was well explained including nature recovery and cost effectiveness was a clear criterion in the cost analyses of the projects.

10.4 The Chair discussed that this report showed how the council was leading by example to reduce its carbon footprint cost effectively. She thanked Cllr Vardy who had worked hard on this project over the past years. Norfolk had the largest offshore wind energy sector in the country and there were opportunities for hydrogen production.

10.5 Cabinet **RESOLVED** to approve the third tranche of actions as set out in this report.

10.6 **Evidence and Reasons for Decision**

Please see section 4 of the report.

10.7 **Alternative Options**

Cabinet could decide to not publish a third tranche of actions, but this would be inconsistent with the previous decisions to publish three tranches. Cabinet could also decide to omit particular items from the plan.

11. **Local Nature Recovery Strategy, Biodiversity Net Gain and Pollinator Action Plan**

11.1.1 Cabinet received the report setting out proposals to help Norfolk County Council achieve key outcomes for the Council's Climate Strategy and the County Council's key priorities by increasing biodiversity and helping the environment be more resilient to climate change for the benefit of wildlife, people, and the economy.

11.1.2 The Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste introduced the report to Cabinet:

- The Environment Act 2021 set out new legislation to require the production of new spatial strategies for nature recovery called Local

Nature Recovery Strategies. Norfolk County Council was the 'Responsible Authority' for the Local Nature Recovery Strategy in Norfolk.

- The Act also required new developments to mitigate loss of biodiversity by creating a net increase of biodiversity created either within development sites or elsewhere, called Biodiversity Net Gain.
- Norfolk County Council was working in partnership with Suffolk County Council by virtue of shared designated areas of natural environment and landscape such as the Broads, Breckland and Coast, as well as shared stakeholders, to produce Local Nature Recovery Strategies by Summer 2025.
- The Strategy would set out the current state of key nature in the county as well as prioritise areas with potential for nature recovery. The Strategy would be used to guide developers or providers of Biodiversity Net Gain to priority places.
- The Local Nature Recovery Strategy and the statutory delivery tool of Biodiversity Net Gain, along with other tools, would create Norfolk's contribution to a National Nature Recovery Network.
- The Norfolk County Council Pollinator Action Plan was one way in which the Council could support and promote biodiversity in the county by contributing to nature recovery.
- The proposals in the report today would help the Council to achieve key outcomes for the Council's Climate Strategy and the County Council's key priorities by increasing biodiversity and helping the environment be more resilient to climate change for the benefit of wildlife, people, and the economy.

- 11.2 The Deputy Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care declared a non-pecuniary interest as a member of the Norfolk Beekeeping Association. She felt that small or hobby beekeepers and the Norfolk Beekeeping Association should be involved in discussions related to this strategy, for their role in supporting pollination.
- 11.3 The Vice Chair noted the importance of bees in pollination and **agreed** to take up the Deputy Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care's point. This report was focussed on what could be done practically by the council. Biodiversity net gain should be considered in all decision making and highlighted the landscape recovery pilot schemes in the county. There were three new environmental landscape management schemes, one of which was found alongside the A149 in north Norfolk, "wild wetter better for nature". This was a practical organisation, lead by farmers and land managers and supported by a cross sector of private and public partnership.
- 11.4 The Vice Chair **moved** an amendment to recommendation 4 to add "and other partners" after "Norfolk Wildlife Trust" at 3.4 in the actions.
- 11.5 The Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport discussed that the council were responsible for 6000 miles of roadways. Roadsides were less trimmed than they used to be to encourage pollinators, alongside a revised weed-killer use policy. Maintenance of trails and greenways to maintain their potential to support pollinators would be reviewed as well. There was a responsibility to keep them clear.
- 11.6 The Cabinet Member for Corporate Services and Innovation noted that the report

included recognition for County Farms highways; at a recent interview for prospective tenants, she was pleased to hear that there was recognition given for the need to let the countryside grow and recover. There was also information in the strategy for what individuals could do to encourage pollinators in their own gardens and spaces.

11.7 The Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste encouraged people to get in touch if there was a dangerous situation, but that, as a rule, verges would be left uncut to encourage pollinators.

11.8 The Chair recognised that some people were in favour of not cutting verges while others were not, but it was key to try to keep areas safe while leaving plants for pollinators. She discussed that beekeepers had been advertising for bee swarms for their bee hives and encouraged anyone who saw one to be in touch with a relevant organisation.

11.9 Cabinet **RESOLVED** to

1. Agree with the timescale to produce the Local Nature Recovery Strategy
2. Agree the role of Norfolk County Council in providing new habitat which can be counted as biodiversity net gain
3. Approve the production of an environment strategy in 2024 that will outline potential for biodiversity net gain uplift as a matter of policy beyond the statutory minimum
4. Agree the adoption of the Pollinator Action Plan by the Council, with the addition of “and other partners” after “Norfolk Wildlife Trust” at 3.4 in the actions.

11.10 **Evidence and Reasons for Decision**

Both the Local Nature Recovery Strategy and Biodiversity Net Gain are statutory requirements upon the County Council.

The Pollinator Action Plan was developed using the best available scientific evidence and subject to further scrutiny from European experts. The Action Plan is based on sound science and can be implemented by the County Council on its own property holdings and other landowners and land managers.

11.11 **Alternative Options**

There is no alternative option for producing Local Nature Recovery Strategy or Biodiversity Net Gain.

There is no alternative for the Pollinator Action Plan that would result in the same outcomes.

12. **Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 and Investigatory Powers Act 2016 Annual Report**

12.1.1 Cabinet received the report setting out details of the use of RIPA (Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act) and the IPA (Investigatory Powers Act) by the Council in 2023 and seeking approval of the current policies, which had been reviewed and slightly amended.

- 12.1.2 the Cabinet Member for Communities and Partnerships introduced the report to Cabinet:
- This was an annual report to Cabinet.
 - Compliance with the legislation ensured that the Council’s use of investigatory powers was in accordance with the Human Rights Act 1998.
 - This legislation had only been used once in connection with the sale of underage vapes and tobacco.
 - In August 2023 a “paper” inspection of the Council’s use of the legislation was undertaken by the Investigatory Powers Commissioner’s Officer. In a letter from the Investigatory Powers Commissioner to the Chief Executive dated 24 August 2023 he stated that he was “satisfied that your reply provides your assurance that ongoing compliance with RIPA 2000 and the Investigatory Powers Act 2016 will be maintained. As such, your Council will not require further inspection this year.”
- 12.2 The Chair was pleased that the sale of underage vapes to young people was being investigated as this was an issue which needed addressing.
- 12.3 The Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste highlighted the work that teams had been doing to address underage vaping. The Cabinet Member for Communities and Partnerships added that the trading standards team was working with schools to address this issue.
- 12.4 The Cabinet Member for Public Health and Wellbeing discussed that while vaping was healthier for those who already smoked as an aid to stop smoking, it should not be encouraged for those who did not smoke. The full health implications of vaping were not fully understood as vaping had not existed for long enough; nicotine found in vapes was highly addictive.
- 12.5 Cabinet **RESOLVED**
1. To note the use of RIPA and the IPA by the Council in 2023, as set out in Appendix A of the report; and
 2. To approve the revised policy documentation provided at Appendices B and C of the report.
- 12.6 **Evidence and Reasons for Decision**
- The two Acts, the associated Regulations and Codes of Practice set out expectations for local authorities in relation to the oversight of RIPA authorisations for directed surveillance and CHIS and for the acquisition of communications data under the IPA. The recommendations set out in this report meet the requirements of the legislation. There are no other reasonably viable options to the recommendations above.
- 12.7 **Alternative Options**
- These corporate policies were considered to be the most effective way to ensure the Council fulfils its legal responsibilities, when using covert investigatory techniques to gather intelligence for the purposes of one of its regulatory functions.
- 13. Strategic and Financial Planning 2025-26**

13.1.1 Cabinet received the report setting out the framework for how the Council will approach budget setting for 2025-26

13.1.2 The Vice-Chair introduced the report to Cabinet:

- As in previous years this report was the start of setting the budget for the upcoming financial year, 2025-26. The process had begun a month earlier than last year so the final outturn for 2023-24 was not available.
- A balanced budget had been delivered in 2023-24 despite making £60m savings and dealing with in-year cost pressures of over £45m. The Vice-Chair thanked the Director of Strategic Finance and his team for this.
- At £45m, this year's savings target would be difficult and would be found through two rounds of budget challenge to be held in June or July and September 2024. A third round was needed in 2023 due to funding announcements in the autumn statement and reduction in the Services Grant, mitigated by a one-off allocation of £10m from Government in January 2024.
- A rise in demand and cost had been seen in Adult Social Services and Children's Services. In Children's Services this was caused by an increase in cost of external residential and supported care and high demand for social care services, and an increase in parents seeking Education Health and Care Plans for their children had caused an increase in the cost of home to school transport and special school placements.
- In Adult Social Services there had been upward pressure in the price of care packages, especially for adults with learning disabilities.
- The Government settlement for 2024-25 was for one year only and assumptions behind increased pressures for 2025-26 were based on this context.
- Last year, £25m was held centrally to be bid for by savings departments; this was useful and would be repeated this year along with stringent challenge of pressures assumed by departments. Service departments would be asked to deliver savings outside the front line such as transformation and efficiencies. Transformative changes would continue to be delivered such as integration of departments.
- This year, control of procurement and contract management would be a focus, and the Vice-Chair would chair the capital review board to limit the capital programme to a maximum of £50m new borrowing per year.
- Previous savings had been recognised when setting targets for 2025-26, and table 9 showed how £56m would be needed if £12m savings had not already been identified in previous budget rounds. This was particularly demonstrated in Children's Services where the financial result of the multi-year strategy was shown. The Vice-Chair set out his aim to have a greater proportion of future year savings identified by the end of the Medium-Term Financial Strategy.
- The Medium-Term Financial Strategy ran to 2028-29 and included an overall saving requirement of £221.5m once previously identified savings were included, which was a savings requirement of over £50m per year.
- The Council would need Government to deliver multi-year local government finance settlements to increase the funding available for Local Authorities as longer-term funding was needed for robust decision making. A large proportion of Government funding was provided through one-year settlements and one-off grants making long-term planning difficult. Ongoing reliance on Council Tax and Adult Social Services

precept and their increases were unsustainable and Council Tax made up 56% of spending power for local authorities.

- It was important to have a sustainable and fair funding system, addressing historic funding gaps, distribution of funding on assessed need, and council tax reform to address inequalities such as rural residents paying more but receiving less services, and delivering business rates reform. Adult Social Services funding needed to be reformed and funding all new burdens including the national living wage which led to an increase in the council's budget of £11m. Urgent action was needed address issues in Children's Services which lead to an increase in cost and demand of services. It was also important for Government to fund all local government services.
- The Council's devolution deal would allow the Council to grow the economy and provide more jobs for Norfolk.

13.2 The Chair noted that the council budget increased every year, but the Council could not overspend, and were required to provide a balanced budget. The Council provided services that people in Norfolk valued. A three-year settlement from Government would give the Council a chance to plan and with the devolution deal, if agreed, the Council would be able to tailor services that the people of Norfolk want. The Chair thanked staff for their work on developing the budget.

13.3 Cabinet **RESOLVED**

1. To note 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 of the report).
2. To note the key budget risks and uncertainties as set out in this report. (Section 10 of the report).
3. To note 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 of the report, 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 of the report), 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 of the report, 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.

13.4 **Impact and Reasons for Decision**

Please see section 5 of the report.

13.5 **Alternative Options**

Please see section 6 of the report.

14. Decisions made since last meeting

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

The meeting ended at 11:10

Chair of Cabinet

Cabinet
8 May 2024
Public & Local Member Questions

	Public Question Time
6.1	<p>Question from Richard Adcock</p> <p>The W.H.O Treaty is fast approaching to be signed next month by the government on the 26th of May 2024. If the government signs the W H O treaty what impact does the council think this will have on the residents of Norfolk. Will it affect our sovereignty, freedoms, democratic rights & the way councils implement their decisions towards us? As Mr Andrew Bridgen M P suggests.</p>
	<p>Response from the Leader and Cabinet Member for Strategy and Governance</p> <p>No, it'll have no impact on Norfolk County Council democratic processes.</p>
	<p>Supplementary question from Richard Adcock</p> <p>There are many things wrong in the world today. In a democratic society at least at this moment in time the residents of Norfolk can ask questions of our elected representatives, will this STOP If the Government signs the W H O treaty. As Mr Andrew Bridgen M P suggests?</p>
	<p>Response from the Leader and Cabinet Member for Strategy and Governance</p> <p>No, the process of allowing members of the public to contact members of Norfolk County Council's Cabinet will stay in place.</p>

Cabinet
8 May 2024
Public & Local Member Questions

Local Member Question Time	
7.1	<p>Question from Cllr Catherine Rowett</p> <p>Does the Cabinet have any strategy to address the problem of damage to rural roads and verges by the increasing numbers of very large agricultural vehicles, where farmers have to access their fields via narrow country lanes, given that market pressures encourage farmers to invest in larger machinery to cut costs?</p>
	<p>Response from the Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport</p> <p>The Council recognises the concerns raised relating to large vehicles using the highway network especially in rural areas and the damage they can cause. However, it is national legislation that sets out the size of machinery that can legally use the highway network. The Council has previously raised with government similar concerns relating to the weight and size of agricultural machinery using the highway network and how this impacts on the asset. However, in Norfolk, supporting the agriculture industry is also essential.</p> <p>The Council's teams continue to identify and prioritise defects as part of their routine highways inspections in line with the Transport Asset Management Plan (TAMP). In addition, the Council also has an ongoing programme of proactive highway maintenance and improvements to ensure the network in Norfolk is safe and well maintained, both now and for the future.</p>
7.2	<p>Question from Cllr Jamie Osborn</p> <p>The proposed changes to the Dereham Road / Grapes Hill junction are due to be funded through money earmarked for sustainable transport (via the BSIP). The consultation on the proposals showed that the only group who were in favour of the changes were motorists. Cyclists and pedestrians were unhappy with the proposals, and bus users were neutral, according to the consultation. Does the Cabinet Member think that a scheme that only motorists support and which does not have the support of bus users, pedestrians, or cyclists is a good use of sustainable transport money?</p>
	<p>Response from the Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport</p> <p>This project is funded by the Bus Service Improvement Plan, which is primarily focused on providing improvements for bus users and was initially identified as a key network improvement by the bus operators. This scheme will improve bus journey times and reliability by enabling the bus to get into the bus lane safely and get to the head of the junction ready for its right turn up Grapes Hill. The scheme provides better lane discipline making the environment safer for all users, including people who cycle, and doesn't remove any of the existing cycle facilities. For pedestrians, the minor narrowing of the footpath is offset by relocating existing highway signage to give more usable pavement space at pinch points.</p>

	Local Member Question Time
	<p>The consultation gave an opportunity for all those potentially affected by the scheme to respond. Of the 63 people who responded, 7 said they predominantly cycled through the area, and 12 said they walked through. These respondents did highlight concerns and we have considered these as part of finalising the proposals. Whilst the majority of the respondents to the consultation said they drove through the area and were in favour of the scheme, this does not imply that the scheme does not have the support of those using the bus, walking or cycling, as very few of those network users replied.</p> <p>Bus passengers, and non-bus users, tell us that reliability is the key thing they want from a bus service and this proposal will reduce bus journey times and improve bus journey reliability, representing an excellent use of this sustainable transport funding.</p>
7.3	Question from Cllr Colleen Walker
	<p>Now the worst of the storm season has hopefully passed residents in Hemsby and along much of the Norfolk coastline will be counting the cost and wondering if there will be any help for them before next autumn or whether they will be forgotten until the next headlines of serious loss and damage. Has the Leader yet had any response from the Secretary of State to her letter of 30 January and what other urgent steps is she taking to stop residents suffering the consequences of erosion from feeling abandoned?</p>
	Response from the Leader and Cabinet Member for Strategy and Governance
	<p>There has been no response to this letter. We are chasing for a response to this.</p>
7.4	Question from Cllr Terry Jermy
	<p>The corporate plan and report from last year is long on narrative but short on detail of what targets were set, what progress was actually made against those targets, the reasons for any shortfall and what that means for service standards and delivery. Without those, Norfolk residents have to rely on the administration's version rather than objective measures. Will the Leader correct that omission by publishing data on targets and measurable achievements against those targets?</p>
	Response from the Leader and Cabinet Member for Strategy and Governance
	<p>Our Council Delivery Plan and Annual Review – both published annually - are a way to provide a narrative update on our priorities and activities for our residents in a concise and accessible way. Our priorities and plans stem from department strategies aligned to our corporate strategy Better Together, for Norfolk.</p> <p>As you know delivery is measured through our Corporate Vital Signs, which are reviewed by Cabinet quarterly and published with all other papers for anyone to read.</p>
	Supplementary question from Cllr Terry Jermy
	<p>Residents in Thetford have really noticed the County Councils reduced efforts to tackle weeds across the town. Thetford is also very often one of the last places to get our now sole weed spray for the year. Can the Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport reassure Thetford residents that this issue that blights our communities is a priority and that Thetford will not be left until last again?</p>

	Local Member Question Time
	Response from the Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport
	<p>Following a public consultation concerning reducing weed treatments from two treatments to one in December 2022, the Council agreed to implement a reduction from 2023. The reduction has two main benefits: environmental improvements by contributing towards the Council's glyphosate policy by halving the amount of product used on the highway network.</p> <p>With regard to weed treatment in Thetford, the programme will be reviewed to establish whether the treatment can be completed earlier in the weed growing season, although to be fully effective, the weedkiller needs to be applied when there is some weed growth present.</p>
7.5	Question from Cllr Brenda Jones
	<p>In the light of the revelation there are 1800 care vacancies, the administration has not been able to keep up with demand, and the demand for care services continues to grow, will the Leader reconsider the proposals put by Labour to February's budget Council to tackle the workforce crisis and structural flaws in the way the council commissions care services?</p>
	Response from the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care
	<p>Thank you for your question. Just to be clear Norfolk County Council vacancies in this area are currently about 40.</p> <p>As we know, there are still significant workforce challenges in the care industry both locally and nationally.</p> <p>I am working in partnership with key stakeholders including Norfolk Care Association, Norfolk and Waveney's Integrated Care Board, and local Higher and Further Education institutions, as we continuously seek to respond to local and national challenges both in the long and short term. The Norfolk Care Careers Team has recently been strengthened to improve both workforce capacity and quality. The team supports individual members of the workforce and adult social care providers with recruitment, retention, well-being and skills. They also champion the professionalism of the sector, promote the career pathways available, and seek to recognise and act upon opportunities for integration within the wider system.</p>
7.6	Question from Cllr Julie Brociek-Coulton
	<p>Residents and I were pleased to see that gutters around the Angel Road Junior School building were cleared recently. Could the Cabinet Member for Corporate Services and Innovation advise whether there is a schedule of maintenance in place for the empty site to stop the building from falling into complete disrepair and preventing the site from being developed into a SEND school?</p>
	Response from the Cabinet Member for Corporate Services and Innovation
	<p>The Evolution Academy Trust (EAT) is still responsible for this site. The site tidy that took place recently was organised by that organisation, who are still the leaseholders for the site.</p>

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	At present maintenance remains with this Responsible Body and it is not appropriate for NCC to put anything in place until such time as it is surrendered back. We continue to work with EAT in the meantime.
	Supplementary question from Cllr Julie Brociek-Coulton
	Next month will see the third anniversary of Angel Road Junior School closing and being relocated. Why has the process of returning the school back to the Council taken so long?
	Response from the Cabinet Member for Children's Services
	The Secretary of State, in approving the disposal, conditioned the return to coincide with the renewal of the lease for the Infant School.
7.7	Question from Cllr Mike Sands
	Another road scheme in the city overruns bringing disruption to road users and business. Rather than just claiming all is well and he knows best, will Cllr Plant now put his hands up and admit those who know the city ought to have a bigger voice in our roads and traffic management schemes and bring back a public facing joint body councillors and the public can engage with instead of having decisions that aren't working imposed on them from behind closed doors?
	Response from the Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport
	<p>The County Council has a strong, national reputation as being a local authority that delivers on the ground, at pace, through strong, collaborative relationships with transport providers and a wide range of stakeholders. Our success in delivery of the Transport for Norwich programme has acted as a springboard to securing significant funding from government for initiatives such as zero emission buses and our Bus Service Improvement Plan, all of which strongly support our Local Transport Plan, Environment Policy and Norfolk Climate Strategy.</p> <p>We consult on all our transport proposals and this feedback is shared with County and District (including City) Council members who are invited to fully participate in discussions. The governance we have in place for transport issues in Norwich involves County and District (including City) Council councillors and lead officers working together on a Steering Group in a way that enables open and frank discussions to be held, allowing the best possible transport solutions and strategies to be developed. Discussions that take place will clearly and transparently inform the subsequent decisions I take on highway matters as the Cabinet Member.</p>
	Supplementary question from Cllr Mike Sands
	Can the Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport confirm the number of highways compensations for the most recent financial year and compare them against historical numbers and explain why the numbers have gone up so far so quickly?
	Response from the Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport

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	<p>The volume of highway compensation claims vary depending on several factors including the weather. Although not as cold as many previous years, the past year has seen a number of significant storm events (11 named storms so far compared with 2 for the previous year). This has led to an increase in the number of claims received by the Council.</p> <p>In total, 841 highway claims were received in 2023/24, compared with 557 for the year before. To date, 690 of the 2023/24 claims have been denied, with 428 from the year before being denied.</p>
7.8	Question from Cllr Alison Birmingham
	New checks brought in under the UK's Brexit trade agreement will cost businesses in Norfolk through higher overheads and prices passed on to consumers. Has the Cabinet Member for Growing the Economy made an assessment of the impact of these increases on local businesses and the cost of living crisis?
	Response from the Cabinet Member for Economic Growth
	It is of course a matter for National Government. However, our economic development team, including the Growth Hub, will work with businesses using best practice from businesses we have been working with. We are also developing a new Economic Strategy for Norfolk to support local businesses meet challenges and take advantage of opportunities.
7.9	Question from Cllr Mike Smith-Clare
	Although it is disappointing there was no bid for Wensum Lodge from a community interest group, the scale of the task makes that unsurprising. However that does not mean Wensum Lodge should be lost to the community. Will the administration join with Labour county councillors in committing to ensuring Wensum Lodge remains in public or community ownership and is used for arts, cultural and educational purposes?
	Response from the Cabinet Member for Communities and Partnerships
	<p>As Cllr Smith-Clare notes no community group put in a proposal during the 'moratorium' period, during which information on the condition and running costs of the site were provided to interested parties. The site is now being formally marketed and Norfolk County Council will consider any bids from community groups, alongside commercial offers.</p> <p>As such, NCC is willing to consider offers from public sector or voluntary groups for the site. However given the importance of the site, will need to have confidence that they have sufficient finance and structures in place to manage a large and complex site.</p>
7.10	Question from Cllr Matt Reilly
	Recent discussion about rail services in Norfolk have once again highlighted Haughley Junction and Ely as requiring investment. However the Trowse swing bridge that acts as a bottleneck into Norwich station is not getting much of a mention despite an upgrade being crucial to improving services from Norwich. Will the Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport confirm Trowse remains

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	<p>one of the key priorities of the county council as the strategic transport authority for rail investment in the region and update us on what steps are being taken to secure the investment needed?</p> <p>Response from the Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport</p> <p>I can confirm that Trowse remains one of the key priorities of the county council.</p> <p>The county council has a long history of working with national, regional and local partners to secure investment into the railways. Over the last few years, officers and I have worked very closely with organisations including Transport East, train operators, government and Network Rail. This work has led to some very significant investment. This includes complete renewal of all the train fleet operated by Greater Anglia, the first time the fleet for a whole franchise has been renewed. In Norfolk this covers the Norwich to London, Cambridge, Sheringham, Great Yarmouth and Lowestoft services.</p> <p>As Cabinet Member, as well as representing the county on local groups, I represent the council on Transport East and – together with officers – the various task forces that Transport East or other regional bodies lead: East West Rail Mainline Partnership Board and Eastern Section Board; Great Eastern Mainline Partnership; Ely Task Force; and the Rail Leadership Meeting that brings together these strands of work, which is held in Westminster and to which MPs are invited.</p> <p>There is a lot of activity seeking improvements to rail for Norfolk, which is achieving positive results. At the end of last year, there was government commitment to the much-needed improvements at Haughley Junction and Ely area enhancements. These now need pushing over the line to secure final funding awards. The opportunity to secure investment is a live issue now for these schemes and we don't want this to be missed, hence the increased coverage at this time.</p> <p>I will continue to represent the county's interests across the various rail groups highlighted, and Trowse will remain a priority. I look forward to working with Network Rail on their forthcoming Norfolk and East Suffolk area study, which will provide additional evidence around constraints to improved rail services and – I anticipate – a step towards securing investment to overcome bottlenecks such as Trowse.</p>
7.11	<p>Question from Cllr Chrissie Rumsby</p> <p>Whatever happened to proposals for a country park that was supposed to make good some of the shortfall for the commitment unanimously agreed by council in 2024 that we would increase trees by a million by the end of 2024 – that is a million after discounting those that have been lost for other reasons or not survived once planted, a target that will be missed by a considerable margin?</p> <p>Response from the Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste</p> <p>The case for woodland creation in Norfolk is a strong one, not only to help fulfil our commitment to plant 1 million trees across the county but to help provide important benefits such as carbon storage, biodiversity, and areas for recreation. The Country Park proposals put to Infrastructure and Development Committee last year is</p>

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7.12	<p>Question from Cllr Ben Price</p> <p>What action does the Cabinet plan to take against their consultants WSP, in relation to what appears to have been poor quality research, surveys and advice concerning the bat colonies in the area of the proposed NWL road, and what recompense will be sought for the wasted £47m that's been spent on the basis of their inadequate advice?</p>
	<p>Response from the Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport</p> <p>Extensive bat surveys over several years along with expertise and advice from bat specialists have given us a good understanding of the area and are informing our proposals for the Norwich Western Link. The project team have had regular contact with Natural England over a number of years and their input has helped to shape the approaches that have been taken.</p> <p>The county council and Natural England are committed to continuing to discuss the issues with the aim of finding a solution and we believe we can provide further information for Natural England to consider in support of this.</p>
	<p>Supplementary question from Cllr Ben Price</p> <p>In the event that the answer to the above question is no action and no recompense, we assume that the Cabinet takes personal liability for the loss, so will the Leader and Highways member resign?</p>
	<p>Response from the Leader and Cabinet Member for Strategy and Governance</p> <p>We will continue to work with Government and Natural England to deliver the Norwich Western Link as promised in our Manifesto and for the majority of Norfolk residents who support it.</p>
7.13	<p>Question from Cllr Brian Watkins</p>

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	<p>With the Council moving towards a change of governance and the endorsement of the County Deal in July, most Norfolk people still know little or nothing about its likely implications. When the Council backed the ‘in principle agreement’ in December, you acknowledged that much work needed to be done to improve the level of public understanding. People want to know what changes and what benefits they will see if the deal happens. As things stand now, what would you tell someone at a public meeting who asked you, ‘How is this going to help me and my family?’</p>
	<p>Response from the Leader and Cabinet Member for Strategy and Governance</p>
	<p>It is our intention to resume our engagement around devolution to strengthen our residents’ understanding of what it means for them once Council has voted in July. If that is passed, we will then increase our public awareness programme even further in support of the May 2025 election of the Directly Elected Leader. Devolution can help people in many different ways: Having the adult education budget means we can help boost local skills providers to offer education that is needed and supports our local businesses. Growing our economy and creating better jobs means our young people can remain in the county and earn more, instead of having to move to get good work because wages are higher elsewhere. Funding to unlock housing sites will help with building more affordable homes in places where they’re much needed but where developers would struggle alone. Investment in transport, better routes and infrastructure can make the difference between a young person being able to access college or an apprenticeship, or older people connecting with services they need. These are changes that individually may not always be felt on a day to day basis, but together combine to improve people’s lives significantly.</p>
	<p>Supplementary question from Cllr Brian Watkins</p>
	<p>A new Care Leavers’ Fund has recently been launched nationally to support young people about to leave local authority care. It will provide match funding for local projects aimed at helping them to make the best start in life. Whilst the Council is already working hard to provide a good range of support for care leavers, its ability to drive the scale of change needed is limited. Can the Cabinet member detail how the Council intends to take advantage of this new programme to help transform the life chances of our county’s care leavers as they transition into adulthood?</p>
	<p>Response from the Cabinet Member for Childrens Services</p>
	<p>We fully support the Governments additional support for care leavers, and we look forward to working with the Norfolk Community Foundation (NCF).</p> <p>NCF have been awarded funds that will be focused on two existing areas of the foundation’s care leaver support, as well as setting up a new Independent Living Fund that supports care leavers to live independently and grow self-esteem.</p> <p>This is in addition to and complements our already strong local offer to Care Leavers which supports our care experienced young people on a range of fronts to thrive and succeed in adult life.</p>

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	We welcome working alongside NCF given our long-standing relationship with them and have been in contact with them about how we can work in collaboration on progressing this work.
7.14	Question from Cllr Rob Colwell
	After hearing of the costs associated with other directly elected leader/mayors elsewhere in the country, residents have been in contact with me about the potential cost to this council in introducing our own DEL? Can the leader outline the potential expense of introducing this new role into our governance?
	Response from the Leader and Cabinet Member for Strategy and Governance
	Unlike Mayoral Combined Authorities who have their own staff (e.g. Chief Executive, Monitoring Officer, support structures) and running costs, Norfolk's devolution deal does not require us to create a new local authority and an additional layer of governance in Norfolk. A directly elected leader would be supported by the County Council's existing officers and systems. As stated in the report to Full Council on 1 December 2023, a 2025 Election would cost the Council an additional c.£190,000 for the additional polling cards, postal voting papers and ballot papers. As part of negotiating the devolution deal, Government has committed £750,000 of capacity funding which will contribute to the costs. All other costs associated with the County Council elections are accounted for as part of the four-year County Council Election cycle.
	Supplementary question from Cllr Rob Colwell
	With the announcement that an academy trust is thinking of scrapping the teaching assistant role, and fear others might follow, teachers telling me they're quitting because of the lack of TA support in growing class sizes. Additionally, many classes have significant numbers of students with special educational needs, due to a lack of specialist places in the county making the job without TAs even more difficult. What reassurance can be given to teachers across the county that you are taking the SEN crisis in our schools seriously.
	Response from the Cabinet Member for Children's Services
	It is, of course, for individual schools and multi-academy trusts to determine how they organise their SEND provision and teaching assistants are an important part of that provision alongside whole school training for SEND and the support of other professionals. The commitment of the council to SEND and AP (Alternative Provision) provision and support has been significant and sustained over the past five year period, initially through the councils £120million capital investment to build special schools and specialist resource bases and most recently with the announcement last year of further capital funding agreed with the DfE for two more special schools and also a joint DfE / NCC revenue investment of £100million+ to support greater inclusion in local mainstream schools through our Local First Inclusion programme (LFI).
	LFI has already in its first year developed a new School & Community Team working across our 15 school and community zones to support schools and families for children at 'SEN Support', with these teams complementing the support that schools provide directly from their delegated £39million annual funding for SEND and also

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	the 'top up' from the High Needs Block of £30million+. We will continue to work alongside schools to provide funding and advice and guidance to ensure that best practice is shared to ensure county-wide consistency.
7.15	Question from Cllr David Sayers
	Could the Cabinet Member please clarify the extent to which Norfolk County Council is taking responsibility for ensuring walkways and pavements comply with December 2021 Department for Transport best practice for making walkways inclusive of all? Additionally, what measures is this council implementing to address any existing barriers and ensure that pedestrian infrastructure across Norfolk is truly inclusive and accessible to all members of the community?
	Response from the Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport
	Developer Services / Major Developments have been aware of Inclusive Mobility since the original document was published in 2002, and the design standards used by developers for new footways and cycle paths are in accordance with that document. The 2021 revision, it does not appear to have made any fundamental changes to the key chapters related to our area of work. Additionally, cycle paths on new developments would be expected to be designed in accordance with the principles of LTN1/20. Our Infrastructure Development and Highways Project Teams complete Equality Impact Assessments (EQIA's) for their schemes and undertake consultations when changes to the highway are proposed with stakeholders including representative groups for walking, cycling and those people with health conditions or impairments. We have removed barriers on footway/cycleways in Kings Lynn as part of the town deal project and we have a feasibility underway to remove barriers across Norwich following a cargo bike audit. Norfolk County Council's Walking, Wheeling and Cycling Strategy (2024) which was adopted by Cabinet on 8 April 2024, sets out the Council's commitment to removing barriers to provide a network that is accessible, inclusive and considers the needs of all users. (there are more details on p36 and p37 of the document) https://www.norfolk.gov.uk/media/33439/Walking-Wheeling-and-Cycling-Strategy-2024-Accessible/pdf/mpWalking_Wheeling_and_Cycling_Strategy_2024_Accessible.pdf?m=1712670313813
	Supplementary question from Cllr David Sayers
	In light of recent remarks by experts following announcements to potential cuts to sickness benefits for individuals with depression or anxiety, what proactive steps is the council taking to counteract the potential detrimental impact on vulnerable members of our community? Additionally, how does the council plan to assert its voice against such callous policies, ensuring the welfare of those with mental health conditions remains a priority despite the Conservative government's apparent disregard?
	Response from the Cabinet Member for Public Health and Wellbeing

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	We believe the Government is putting in place appropriate support for people with these conditions.
7.16	<p>Question from Cllr Steffan Aquarone</p> <p>Consultations are a vital tool in reaching out to our residents on important issues. However, residents are reporting the inaccessibility and difficulty in navigating consultations, which only serves to limit responses. A resident has contacted me about their experience answering the savings consultation noting its pages upon pages of background information making it difficult to make a considered response, they also noted the lack of advertising the consultation seemed to have. Why are this council's consultations a source of constant frustration for members of the public and what is being done to ensure we are using the best practice possible in our outreach efforts?</p> <p>Response from the Leader and Cabinet Member for Strategy and Governance</p> <p>As a member of the Consultation Institute, we follow best practice and our consultation materials are accessible and produced in different formats such as Easy Read, home print and large print. We also produced videos in British Sign Language posted on the landing page of our digital consultation platform. Residents can email HaveYourSay@norfolk.gov.uk or call our customer service centre to request Braille, alternative format or different languages.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We promoted three Community & Environmental Services (CES) which ran from Thursday 15 February to 22 March and two Adult Social Care (ASC) consultations launched on Monday 19 February and continue until 17 May. <p>Our promotional methods include print, media and digital channels covering:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Press releases to all media partners and channels across Norfolk • Email briefing to members of our Norfolk Resident's Panel • Social media promotion through paid Facebook advertisements and organic posts on X (previously known as Twitter), Facebook, and Nextdoor • Posters displayed at all 19 recycling sites along with leaflets for staff to share with customers • Letters and copies of the survey posted to those individuals directly impacted by our Adult Social Care proposals, along with a dedicate phone helpline and a number of drop-in events in libraries across the county • Members briefing to all NCC councillors • Letters sent to key stakeholders • Letter to 520 Parish Councils, and promotion via Norfolk Association of Local Councils • NCC Managers Briefing • Information on the staff intranet and staff newsletters (including Friday Takeaway) • Information on the Council's website www.norfolk.gov.uk including the landing page and links to service areas on the site <p>Supplementary question from Cllr Steffan Aquarone</p>

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	In considering reductions in the opening hours of household waste recycling centres, what measures have been taken to limit the impact on the take home pay of our loyal and helpful staff at the centres, and what evidence can be provided to show these measures have worked?
	Response from the Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste
	The decision on the opening hours of household recycling centres has not been made.