

Infrastructure and Development Select Committee

Minutes of the Meeting Held on Wednesday 15 November
10.00am, held at County Hall, Norwich

Present:

Cllr James Bensly – Chair

Cllr Claire Bowes
Cllr Chris Dawson
Cllr Jim Moriarty
Cllr Rob Colwell
Cllr William Richmond

Cllr Catherine Rowett
Cllr Chrissie Rumsby
Cllr Robert Savage
Cllr Vic Thomson
Cllr Maxine Webb
Cllr Tony White

Also Present:

Cllr Kay Mason Billig	Leader and Cabinet Member for Strategy and Governance
Cllr Eric Vardy	Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste
Cllr Margaret Dewsbury	Cabinet Member for Communities and Partnerships

Also Present:

Titus Adam	Assistant Director of Finance
Harvey Bullen	Director of Strategic Finance
Tom Galer	Finance Business Partner, CES
Sophie Leney	Head of Trading Standards
Nicola Ledain	Committee Officer, Democratic Services
Sarah Rhoden	Director of Community Information and Learning, CES
Ceri Sumner	Director of Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service
Chris Starkie	Director of Growth and Investment, Strategy and Transformation

1. Apologies and substitutions

1.1 Apologies received from Cllr David Bills and Interim Executive Director Grahame Bygrave.

2. Minutes

2.1 The minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 13 September 2023 were agreed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

3. Declarations of Interest

3.1 There were no interests declared.

4. Items of Urgent Business

4.1 There were no items of urgent business.

5. Public Question Time

5.1 There were no public questions received.

6. Local Member Issues / Questions

6.1 There were no members questions submitted.

7. County Deal Update

7.1 The Select Committee received the report which provided an update on County Deal activity, building on information that was provided to this committee on Wednesday 12 July 2023.

7.2 Considering the amount of people who were on Council's housing waiting lists, Members asked if there were opportunities within the County Deal to increase the amount of Council housing available. The Leader replied that the brownfield funding of £6.9 million initially would be available however housing developments would be in conjunction with the relevant District Council as the planning authority and each District Council had their own criteria of the amount of social housing that they required within a development.

7.3 The Leader confirmed that the £20 million Investment Fund received as part of the County Deal would not be index linked, but she highlighted that none of the deals offered elsewhere in the Country had been index linked. The funding was expected to be used to leverage other funding.

7.4 The Directly Elected Leader would still be under a majority rule at Norfolk County Council and would not be able to set a budget without the majority being in favour. There would still be constraints through the constitution which would provide the framework for them to operate, and they would still need to have a Cabinet. They would not be a Councillor but would have to abide by the Code of Conduct. The Leader clarified that the Deal was devolving power down from Central Government and not devolving powers up from District Councils.

7.5 With regards to page 19, point 6.6 of the agenda, Members asked for more information regarding the proposed partnership with Great British Railways. The Director of Growth and Investment explained that as part of a Devolved Deal, Government was giving those devolved areas the opportunity to be involved in discussions regarding franchises and the structure of the local rail network. Whilst this wouldn't give extra powers, it would give the opportunity to influence and be involved in developments as an official rather than an organisation who might be consulted. This relationship was expected to evolve over time.

7.6 As part of the proposed Deal, the Council would have greater autonomy over the Integrated Transport Settlement Fund which was referred to in point 6.2 of the agenda. Currently, Norfolk County Council had to wait for Central Government to decide on the amount of funding which could be different amounts at different times of the year which in turn meant that planning for the highways was difficult. It was expected, as had occurred with other devolved areas, that a lump sum settlement would be for 5 years, and although this was not more money it equated to a 15-20% uplift due to greater certainty, better planning, and therefore better efficiency.

7.7 The Gateway Review, referred to in point 3.3 of the agenda, was a review conducted by Government to ensure that the un-ringfenced Investment Fund of £20 million had

been used for the purpose which it was intended. It was a way of Government assuring that the money was spent on what the Council had proposed. Officers reported that none of the devolved areas had failed a Gateway Review to date.

- 7.8 The Leader confirmed that there would not be any change to the timetable and that a decision must be made at Full Council on Tuesday 12 December. There was uncertainty regarding what would be announced in the Chancellor of the Exchequers Autumn Statement and how that would affect the Deal. The statement would be released on Wednesday 22 November 2023.
- 7.9 The Deal being offered to Norfolk was unique due to the structure of the authorities being one upper tier County Council and seven Districts with no Unitary Authorities. Suffolk and Cornwall were the only 2 other Counties in the Country who had the same structure. The Leader clarified that it would be important to keep District Councils involved and to ensure they were included in developments.
- 7.10 Officers explained that they were waiting for delayed guidance from the Department for Transport (DfT) regarding the Local Transport Plan (LTP). Work had begun to update the plan specifically around quantifiable carbon reductions in anticipation of the guidance being published. The Committee heard that devolved areas were asked to have a LTP in place as part of the Deal as many did not have them prior to changing their governance arrangements. Norfolk were in a good place as they already had LTP4 in place. As soon as guidance was published, the plan was ready to be updated to comply with that guidance. Officers confirmed that the Select Committee would continue to have oversight of the LTP under the proposed deal.
- 7.11 Having offered thoughts and feedback on activity to date and proposed next steps, the Select Committee **RESOLVED** to agree that further progress reports were presented to the Committee as appropriate.

8. Strategic and Financial Planning 2024-25

- 8.1 The Select Committee received the report which appended the latest Cabinet report in order to provide details of the saving proposals identified to date for 2024-25 Budget setting. This was provided to support the Select Committee's discussion of the specific proposals and enabled the Committee to provide its feedback and input to a future meeting of Cabinet and thereby to inform budget decisions. The report formed an important part of the process of developing the 2024-25 Budget, representing a key opportunity for the Select Committee to provide its views on priorities and the budget proposals for the services within its remit.
- 8.2 The Committee noted that of the £46 million savings that had to be found, there was a £20 million gap which was the amount of funding the Council would receive as part of the County Deal. The Committee questioned if the £20 million funding was being relied upon to fill the budget gap. The Leader confirmed that the £20 million Investment Fund money from the County Deal could not be used to fill any budget gap. Through each budget round services were reviewed but the Leader confirmed that she wanted to avoid cuts to front line services. The Director of Strategic Finance confirmed that a balanced budget would be produced in time to be approved by Cabinet. Ways to close the budget gap were currently being identified such as additional savings and the possible use of reserves. This would all be affected by the news of the Government's Autumn Statement.

- 8.3 The Committee heard that the income generation referred to at page 27, point 2.5 of the agenda related to the CES Department's strategy. Currently CES charged for licences, applications, library booking rooms, and the hire of equipment for example. Officers were reviewing best practice in the community and other Local Authorities to ensure fair prices for those paying the fees that reflected the market.
- 8.4 With regards to the savings proposal on page 49 of the agenda, The Director for Community Information and Learning reassured the Committee that the learning and development budget was being reduced due to the change in behaviour and ability to attend training and conferences. Due to the increase in staff being able to attend virtually, it was automatically costing the service less. There was no intent to reduce the number of training opportunities. The reduction of cleaning would bring standards to a level more consistent with other office buildings.
- 8.5 The Leader confirmed that the Moving Traffic Offences mentioned on page 51 of the agenda referred to cameras which Norfolk Constabulary had previously been responsible for. This responsibility had now been placed with Norfolk County Council who would also receive the income generated from those cameras.
- 8.6 The Committee heard that Norfolk County Council needed to set a robust budget which was realistic and deliverable. Departments were asked to review their savings closely to ensure that the savings were deliverable, and each saving was closely reviewed by finance teams, officers, and management teams to ensure that it was realistic. If it was not delivered there would be a significant overspend on year 2.
- 8.7 The Committee heard that borrowing costs impacted on the revenue budget and therefore would have an implication of the level of savings to be made. There had been a significant amount of borrowing over the last few years which had been at low interest rates which were fixed for several years so the impact of that was minimal. The Committee heard that the level of borrowing which could be made in future years was more of a concern. As part of this, the Capital Programme was being reviewed as it contained assets which would deliver those services.
- 8.8 The Leader reported that 'Your Norfolk' magazine would be delivered to every household in the County twice per year at an estimated cost of £120,000 per annum for producing and delivering the magazine. It would be featured in the 2024/2025 budget. Following conversations with the Police and Crime Commissioner, the Leader highlighted that the Office of Police and Crime Commissioner Norfolk had a budget for this type of communication and with the addition of some advertising within the magazine it was hoped that it would be cost-neutral.
- 8.9 Having reviewed and commented on the report, the Select Committee **RESOLVED:**
1. To consider the latest Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy position as reported to Cabinet in October 2023 (Appendix 1), noting in particular the emerging risks and uncertainties within the Council's planning position.
 2. To consider and comment on the savings proposals for 2024-25 as set out in Appendix 1, which fall within the Committee's remit (savings marked with reference S2425CES in Appendix 1 Table 5).
 3. To note the budget gap which remains to be closed for 2024-25 and in this context to comment on any areas the Select Committee would recommend exploring for savings development in relation to the services within the Select Committee's remit, in order to provide further input to the 2024-25 budget process and inform the final package of saving proposals put forward to Cabinet later in the year. In

particular the Committee considered savings opportunities under the following headings:

- a. New initiatives which would deliver savings;
- b. Activities which could be ceased in order to deliver a saving;
- c. Activities which the Council should seek to maintain at the current level as far as possible (i.e. areas where the Committee considers there is limited scope for savings).

9. CES Compliance and Enforcement Policy – Annual Review

- 9.1 The Select Committee received the report which highlighted that the Policy had been reviewed and updated to reflect recent changes to legislation and guidance. A revised CES Compliance and Enforcement Policy was attached at Appendix A with proposed amendments highlighted with explanatory notes.
- 9.2 Officers explained that the amendment to remove the reference to British Sign Language was a simplification to the text and to be more inclusive and diverse rather than less by not specifying particular needs. Officers agreed to reword and relist British Sign Language if appropriate.
- 9.3 The Committee asked if Norfolk County Council had enforcement power over Anglian Water with regards to sewage. Officers agreed to supply a written response.
- 9.4 The Committee asked where the Council couldn't identify the landowner if a ditch needed clearing, what action could be taken. Officers agreed to supply a written response. The Chair reminded the Committee that at the meeting of the Scrutiny Committee on 22 November 2023 they would be discussing flood issues.
- 9.5 With regards to page 148 of the agenda, the Chair asked for more information regarding the figures referring to the number of unsafe items taken out of the marketplace. Officers reported that the unsafe items were taken off local online marketplaces as well as items that had been tested and found to be unsafe and these were items such as electric chargers. The figures in the report equate to the amount of money that would have been made by selling those items. It was also reported that there had been an explosion of sales of vapes and it was an area that was being focused on. The team were helping those traders who wanted to abide by the law by advising them what was suitable to sell and what wasn't, as well as heavily enforcing those traders who were not as keen to abide by the law and were also selling to those under the age of 18.
- 9.6 Having reviewed the report, the Select Committee **RESOLVED** that:
1. They had reviewed and commented on the revised CES Compliance and Enforcement Policy at Appendix A and its annex documents (A-1 to A-6), prior to consideration by Cabinet.
 2. The 2022/23 enforcement performance data provided at Appendix B, and summary of stakeholder engagement at Appendix C was **NOTED**.

10. Progress with Delivering the Norfolk Access Improvement Plan (NAIP)

- 10.1 The Select Committee received the report which provided an update on progress with delivering the NAIP. The update (in the form of a NAIP monitoring report) is

produced for the Norfolk Local Access Forum (NLAF), an independent forum which advises Norfolk County Council (NCC) and other organisations on ways to improve countryside access. The monitoring report enabled the NLAF to review the Council's progress with delivery of the NAIP. The NLAF's activities and those of its charitable arm Pathmakers, also contributed directly to delivery of the NAIP.

- 10.2 Members asked if consultation and involvement with parish councils and the communities from an early stage happened when work was carried out on public rights of way or trails in their area. The Cabinet Member assured the Committee that this had been taken on board and work was already in place to increase engagement in future.
- 10.3 The figures in the agenda referring to the decline in access of the network since 2021 were from a national report. The Committee heard that there had been work carried out to ensure that there were better communications regarding the network and to publicise it to increase the reach. There had been several projects which had focused on increasing the inclusivity and accessibility of the network. Some of the figures may have referred to the Covid-19 pandemic where there had been some issues with the cutting of the network which had meant that some paths may not have been fully accessible, which had frustrated users.
- 10.4 There was currently a consultation on the 'Walking, Wheeling and Cycling Strategy' and it was hoped from this consultation more detailed analysis of people's current behaviour on the network could be identified.
- 10.5 In response to a question regarding the capacity of dealing with Map Modification Orders, Officers reported that due to the extension of the deadline from January 2026 to January 2031, there had been an increase in the number of Map Modification Order's received and these were being dealt with by the Highways team. The capacity of the team was being reviewed to ensure that the deadline could be met. Officers would share a detailed response in writing.
- 10.6 The Committee expressed that the maintenance of the network was essential and particularly in those years where there was a high volume of growth. The Committee heard that maintenance of the network was being reviewed to ensure that the contractor had capacity particularly in those times where more cutting was needed.
- 10.7 It was reported that counters along the network to monitor the usage were still being used. Low energy bluetooth counters had been trialled with good results from the pilot. These counters allowed information to be transferred easier and had a longer battery life. Procurement of counters was now taking place.
- 10.8 Thanks were expressed to those volunteers of the Norfolk Local Access Forum and those who helped on the network.
- 10.9 Having considered the report, the Select Committee
1. NOTED officers' ongoing work to deliver the Norfolk Access Improvement Plan (NAIP) which was presented in Appendix 1 as the monitoring report covering the period September 2022 to September 2023.
 2. NOTED ongoing work by the Norfolk Local Access Forum and its charity Pathmakers, to improve access to the countryside in Norfolk, as summarised by the Annual Report in Appendix 2.

11. Forward Work Programme

- 11.1 The committee received the report by the Interim Executive Director of Community and Environmental Services, which set out the Forward Work Programme for the committee to enable the Committee to review and shape.
- 11.2 The Director of Director of Community Information and Learning explained that the January meeting was particularly heavy, and some reports could be moved to subsequent meetings.
- 11.3 A Member of the Committee asked if the scheme titled 'The Wash Barrage' could be noted for future agendas and that the Council should be aware of the proposed scheme in order to be involved in early conversations and discussions. The scheme would potentially consist of a road from Hunstanton to Lincolnshire with suggested 40 turbines and a port on the Lincolnshire side.
- 11.4 It was requested by the Committee that the School Streets report was not delayed due to any consultation that may have to be carried with schools during the term time.
- 11.5 The Committee noted that the Climate Action Plan Tranche 2 was time sensitive.
- 11.6 The Select Committee **RESOLVED:**
- To **agree** the Forward Work Programme for the Select Committee, as set out in Appendix A.

The meeting closed at 11.50pm

James Bensly, Chair



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