



# Norfolk County Council

## Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the Meeting held on Thursday 25 January 2024  
at 10am at County Hall Norwich

### Present:

Cllr Steve Morphew (Chair)  
Cllr Daniel Elmer (Vice-Chair)  
Cllr Carl Annison  
Cllr Lesley Bambridge  
Cllr Phillip Duigan  
Cllr John Fisher  
Cllr Tom FitzPatrick  
Cllr Keith Kiddie  
Cllr Brian Long  
Cllr Jamie Osborn  
Cllr Brian Watkins

### Also Present:

|                        |  |
|------------------------|--|
| David Allfrey          | Interim Director of Highways, Transport and Waste                    |
| Harvey Bullen          | Director of Strategic Finance  |
| Grahame Bygrave        | Interim Executive Director for Community and Environmental Services  |
| Paul Cracknell         | Executive Director for Strategy and Transformation                   |
| Cllr Margaret Dewsbury | Cabinet Member for Communities and Partnerships                      |
| Kat Hulatt             | Director of Legal Services and Monitoring Officer                    |
| Cllr Andrew Jameison   | Cabinet Member for Finance   |
| Cllr Kay Mason Billig  | Leader of the Council  |
| Mark Kemp              | Interim Assistant Director – Infrastructure Delivery                 |
| Tom McCabe             | Chief Executive  |
| Steve Miller           | Director of Culture and Heritage and Head of Norfolk Museums Service |
| Cllr Graham Plant      | Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport            |
| Peter Randall          | Democratic Support and Scrutiny Manager                              |
| Colin Scott            | Learning Manager, Norfolk Museums                                    |
| Laine Tisdall          | Committee Officer  |

## 1 Apologies for Absence

1.1 Apologies were received from Cllr Mark Kiddle-Morris and Paul Dunning. Cllr Ed Maxfield was also absent.

## 2 Minutes

2.1 The minutes of the previous meetings held on the 13 and 20 December 2023 were confirmed as an accurate record and signed by the Chair.

### **3. Declarations of Interest**

- 3.1 Cllr Brian Long declared an interest relating to Item 8 on the agenda, as he was the Chair of the Planning (Regulatory) Committee.
- 3.2 Cllr Lesley Bambridge declared an interest relating to Item 7 on the agenda, as she was the Council appointee to the King's Lynn and West Norfolk Area Museums Committee.
- 3.3 The Monitoring Officer confirmed that the advice regarding bias and predetermination, which had been circulated to all Committee Members prior to the 20 December meeting of the Scrutiny Committee, was still valid.

### **4. Public Question Time**

- 4.1 No public questions were received

### **5. Local Member Issues/Questions**

- 5.1 No local member questions were received.

### **6. Call In**

- 6.1 The Committee noted that the deadline for call-in of Cabinet items was 4pm on Tuesday 16 January. No call-ins were received.

### **7. Access to Norfolk Museums**

- 7.1 The Committee received the annexed report (7).
- 7.2 The Cabinet Member for Communities and Partnerships introduced the report, which provided an update regarding current access to the Norfolk Museums Service. The Service aimed to encourage all residents and especially young people and children of all ages to take an interest in museum activities. Free admission options were available to schools and a number of different groups to ensure equality of opportunity.
- 7.3 The Service ran the nationally significant Kick the Dust programme, funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund, between October 2018 and March 2023, which helped young people from targeted backgrounds develop skills and confidence and consider employment in the heritage sector if they wanted to.
- 7.4 The following points were discussed and noted.
- A Committee Member stated it was encouraging that the Museums Service had recovered well from the COVID-19 pandemic given its great record of historical success. The Committee Member queried officers as to whether Virtual Reality (VR)

had been considered for future exhibitions, as Norwich Castle used 3D video in certain galleries. Officers stated VR was an opportunity to be grasped, as the Museum of Norwich had such an installation, which was proving successful in enhancing the visitor experience. The Museums Service was currently undertaking a project with two digital artists creating digital artworks for a VR gallery in the Time and Tide Museum of Great Yarmouth Life.

- A Committee Member asked if there were any plans to improve collaboration with universities and colleges across Norfolk. Officers stated the Museums Service worked alongside the University of East Anglia (UEA) and Norwich University of the Arts (NUA) on a variety of projects. The UEA was a stakeholder in the Norwich Castle: Royal Palace Reborn Project and was also collaborating on the current Norwich Works exhibition, utilising archives from the Norfolk Record Office and footage from the East Anglian Film Archive. There were future plans to collaborate with other universities such as Cambridge and Durham.
- A Committee Member queried the context of the Kick the Dust figures and asked if targets were being reached. Officers stated Kick the Dust was a nationally significant project which had exceeded all engagement targets. The Museums Service liaised with partners such as the YMCA to ensure young people from a variety of backgrounds could engage successfully with museums. A significant percentage of young people who had enrolled in Kick the Dust had gone into further studies or employment within the museum and cultural sector. Kick the Dust was such a success that the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) had illustrated it as a national example of good practice. The NLHF had approved a round one application for the Museums Service for a further project focused on young people working with the YMCA in Leicestershire.
- A Committee Member queried about access for working class children to the Museums Service. Officers stated there was the Stories from the Sea project, which was a partnership between Royal Museums Greenwich and Time and Tide Museum, funded by the Department for Education and Arts Council England. Now in its twelfth year, the project aimed to provide creative education to students in schools in the Great Yarmouth area, focussing resources on children's literacy levels. The Museums Service also worked closely with charities and the Youth Offending Team to get young people to engage with the sector where opportunities were limited.
- A Committee Member asked if there were any future projects aimed towards elderly groups planned, as this had previously been offered by the Museums Service. An officer confirmed that the Service offered a targeted programme for such groups, which involved representatives going into care homes, providing drop-in sessions for dementia patients, and special events at Norwich museums.
- A Committee Member expressed concern that the Museums Service was not being promoted more widely, pointing to the success of Kick the Dust. The Committee Member suggested working closely with English Heritage and other castles locally, with a possible campaign link-up between Norwich Castle and Framlingham Castle in Suffolk as one such opportunity. An officer stated that the Museums Service was fortunate to work along several important partners, stressing that many partnerships were long-term. The Museums Service also delivered the SHARE Museums East

museum development programme on behalf of Arts Council England which covered all museums in Norfolk and the East of England, with 100% of funding coming from the Arts Council. A new partnership with Brighton and Hove Museums would see the two museum services delivering a new South East programme.

- A Committee Member asked if there was scope for corporate events to be held at Norwich Castle once the Palace Reborn Project was complete, suggesting this would enable the Castle to open for longer hours and increase footfall. The Committee Member added that the success of the project could also lead to improvements to Castle Meadow to make it a more pleasant thoroughfare for residents and tourists. Officers expressed gratitude to the Council and the NLHF for their investment in the project. The Grade 1 listed Keep would be futureproofed and fit for purpose for all groups, offering breakfast and evening meetings, weddings, and weekend functions. The Museums Service was beginning to unlock the potential of this capital project. The Cabinet Member for Communities and Partnerships stated that Norwich Castle Museum was continuing to offer ceremonies and often did up to 700 per year. It was planned to work with Norwich City Council on a package of changes to Castle Meadow, hoping to reduce anti-social behaviours and improve the physical appearance of the street through landscaping measures.
- A Committee Member stated he was pleased to see investment in the Time and Tide Museum of Great Yarmouth Life. Officers explained there were plans to illustrate the history of Great Yarmouth, from the Pleistocene to the present day. It was hoped to enclose the forecourt of the museum with glazing to create an open space for to local community groups and school visitors. There was a possibility of generating further income from corporate events.
- A Committee Member stated the Museums Service was a joint partnership between the Council and districts which began in 1974 and had provided an uplift to museums countywide over the 50 successful years of partnership working. The Museums Service also provided support to small independent museums across Norfolk, as they received advice and support from officers in lieu of Council funding.
- A Committee Member mentioned he was pleased to see the access for all provisions in the Norwich Castle: Royal Palace Reborn project. The lift to all parts of the Keep was an important part of the project and should be promoted widely, as the Castle would be more inclusive for disabled visitors.
- The Chair queried officers regarding access to free activities at museums and whether this stimulated numbers attending on open days or enabled visitors to spend more on other activities. Officers stated that free days such as Heritage Open Weekend often saw excellent visitor numbers. On normal open days there would often be a number of people attending museums for free, whether they be schools or other groups. On very popular days such as Lottery Player events, increased visitor numbers were to the point where controls were to be placed at the gate to ensure safety regulations were followed, along with ensuring the sheer number of visitors did not degrade the experience within. Officers felt the current operational model was balanced and flexible.
- The Chair asked officers if there was a model used to assess and identify community groups to work with on projects. An officer explained that Norfolk used a

unique model by working with districts and Arts Council England, which could then illustrate where resources should be allocated. The model worked with both demographics and geography. The Museums Service offered a comprehensive countywide service based on local needs. Input from districts and charities was also routinely received.

- The Chair asked how the Museums Service captured and stored data. Officers stated the five-year strategy report laid out the aims and hopes for the Service as a whole. The Norfolk Joint Museums Committee also played a role in scrutinising reports and documents to ensure matters were on the right trajectory. Programmes such as Kick the Dust were evaluated nationally, requiring thousands of pages of quantitative data to be recorded and stored. The Chair asked if the Norfolk Joint Museums agenda would be the first point of call to find out more on this subject. Officers confirmed this was the case, explaining that the agenda also included district data in the form of minutes from the area working groups of each district.

7.5 Having considered the information presented in the report, The Scrutiny Committee **RESOLVED** the following:

1. **CONSIDERED** potential opportunities for NMS to work with other partners to help mitigate barriers to access.
2. **SUGGESTED** ideas and connections to ensure maximum benefit arose from the Norwich Castle: Royal Palace Reborn project.
3. **AFFIRMED** support for the Time and Tide new development project 'Changing Tides - Shaping Our Great Yarmouth'

## 8. Norwich Western Link Update

8.1 The Scrutiny Committee received the annexed report (8).

8.2 The Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport introduced the report, which was produced in request to the Committee's request for continued scrutiny of the Norwich Western Link (NWL). The Cabinet Member explained that residents around Norwich were being affected by traffic congestion every day. There was a need to support new infrastructure projects in Norfolk, and the NWL would bring national investment to the county. It had only been a few short years since the Northern Distributor Road (NDR) and A11 dualling were completed and it was difficult to see how the Norwich of 2024 would cope without these recently delivered infrastructure projects.

8.3 The Cabinet Member stressed that the Council took its environmental responsibilities seriously. Extensive ecology surveys were being conducted to shape the NWL planning application. Green bridges, underpasses, and improved habitat such as woodland and hedgerows also formed part of the project

8.4 The Department for Transport (DfT) had pledged more than £200m towards the project, with the potential that more funding could be secured. The planning application was due to

be submitted in early 2024, upon which a statutory public consultation would go ahead.

8.5 The Cabinet Member summed up that the NWL would improve journey times and access to sites such as the Norwich Research Park, Norwich Airport, and the Food Enterprise Park in Easton, benefiting the local economy. The NWL would also contribute towards improved road and cycle safety in Norwich. For these reasons, this was a priority infrastructure project for the Council.

8.6 The following points were discussed and noted:

- A Committee Member commented that the DfT were prepared to fund 85% of the original estimate based on 2022 prices, which would be £213m. The cost of the scheme had since increased to £273m due to inflation, leaving a £60m funding gap which the Council could be exposed to. If the DfT agreed to fund 100% of the estimated cost (£251m), this would naturally reduce the funding gap. However, it appeared the project start date would be delayed, with the NWL opening in 2029 at the earliest. Delays to the project could mean the overall cost would increase beyond £273m, with inflationary forecasts for the project stages meaning the final cost could be in the range of £330m, leaving an £80m shortfall. The Committee Member asked the Cabinet Member what contingencies were in place for such an eventuality, as well as how confident the Council was that the DfT would provide more funding. Officers stated the budget reporting for the NWL reflected the 2029 timescale, with forecasts and inflation built into calculations. Risks had also been considered. Regular conversations were taking place between officers and the DfT regarding extra funding; however there was no timescale as to if or when this would be confirmed.
- A Committee Member requested confirmation that the £273m figure was the definite final cost for the NWL with inflation factored in. The Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport stated that as the project progressed, it was normal for risk allowance to reduce as risks were realised and closed during the construction phase. If the final cost of the project were expected to exceed £273m, this would need to be approved by Full Council. Considerable contingencies were built into the project. The Cabinet Member for Finance commented that the NWL had risks and adjustment built into the final cost. There was a £66m contingency built into the project, comprised of inflation and other determined risks. The Cabinet Member expressed support for the work of the officers, stating that sensible and conservative estimates were being made regarding additional potential costs due to inflation. The Chair asked if there was a base date for the estimated final cost. Officers confirmed the calculations were completed in the early 2020s, with inflation built in during late 2022/early 2023. The level of inflation had since decreased.
- A Committee Member asked if the Council had any red lines on the final cost of the NWL. The Cabinet Member for Finance stated that as the outline business case was approved by the government, this meant that the NWL was a government supported project. If there was a marked increase above the £66m contingency, the project would need to go back to Full Council for further reappraisal of the benefits of the

scheme to Norfolk.

- A Committee Member expressed concern about the potential use of council reserves to shore up any funding gaps, given the recent announcement of reserves being used for Adult Social Care matters. The Committee Member asked officers if they could be sure if the NWL project was going ahead. The Cabinet Member for Finance stated the NWL was a key political priority for the Council, which would only be cancelled if government funding was suddenly withdrawn. It appeared likely that the government would approve 100% of funding up to the £251m cost estimate but confirmation of this was still awaited.
- A Committee Member commented that the NWL route decision in 2019 stated Route C offered good value for money and had limited effects on the environment. The Committee Member asked if Cabinet still agreed that the project met these standards and whether the other three route options would be revisited. Officers confirmed there would be no change from Route C, as substantial appraisal work had been undertaken on all routing options prior to the decision being taken.
- A Committee Member asked the Cabinet Member for Finance what level of contingency was originally built into the project, expressing concern that the risk level of the project would increase due to possible legal challenges and the need for the planning application to be approved. The Cabinet Member for Finance highlighted the contingency figure in the latest Cabinet report was around £26m, with inflation at £43m. A large contingency was still being provided to the project, as new issues could arise which the team would have to respond to. The Committee Member stated the cost of the NWL had increased from that in 2021 and 2022 and asked if the contingency was built in when the project cost was originally £150m and then increased to £193m. The Cabinet Member confirmed this was the case. Officers stressed that construction inflation was a challenge that needed to be managed as this had been high over recent years. There was a nationwide shortage of construction materials post-COVID which had now stabilised; however this meant a higher rate of inflation had been assumed in the project costs. All cost estimates had now been projected forward to 2029, with significant allowances made for inflation and risk.
- A Committee Member queried as to where the government had published their response about possibly funding the project to 100% of the estimated cost. Officers stated this was recorded in the government's formal approval letter for the outline business case. Discussion with officials from the DfT were ongoing regarding this. The Cabinet Member for Finance stated that if the 100% funding to £251m was approved, then the Council had already made its contribution towards the project.
- The Chair stated the contingency appeared to have been exceeded each time the cost of the project had been revised and asked if there was a degree of confidence that it would not be exceeded a further time. The Cabinet Member for Finance commented that as the project developed, the team had a clearer idea of how inflation and risk would affect matters. Risk was managed by the risk register, which was then reported back to the project and relevant boards. The Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport and officers stressed that further costs could never be ruled out on major infrastructure projects, however Norfolk County Council

had a track record of delivering such projects. Herring Bridge in Great Yarmouth followed the same process as the NWL and was on track to be delivered on-budget. Other schemes had benefited from funding provided by the government's Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) and Transforming Cities fund.

- A Committee Member asked the Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport if they accepted the level of contingency was not enough at each final cost. The Cabinet Member responded to confirm there was a process in place, with the 2019 costs based on tender quotes from contractors. As the project developed, costs have been revised as more details became accurate.
- A Committee Member expressed concern about the rise in costs, as it appeared there was no clear answer as to where the extra funds would be sourced if the funding gap were more than £20m. The Cabinet Member for Finance stated that the NWL was a capital project.
- The Chair queried biodiversity net gain, as the report mentioned a 10% gain in report. However, the NWL would result in loss of habitat such as rare and veteran trees. The Chair asked for clarity regarding how much irreplaceable habitat would be lost and whether this would influence biodiversity net gain. Officers confirmed that the environmental statement for the NWL would set out the loss of veteran trees, which would form part of the public consultation alongside the planning application. The veteran trees were excluded from the biodiversity net gain calculations as they could not be replaced. The aim was to minimise the effects of the project on veteran trees, as such only a small number were now affected by the NWL. The design of the road was considered to avoid as many trees as possible. Biodiversity net gain was based on metrics provided by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA), which the Council had to comply with and demonstrate 10% net gain from the NWL. The Chair pressed for clarity as to whether lost trees would be replaced in a different way, as it seemed the trees were being disregarded from all calculations. Officers confirmed the environmental statement would demonstrate what impact mitigations were being taken.
- The Vice-Chair asked if trees had a numeric value attached to them when it came to biodiversity net gain calculations. Officers stated this was the case, but that it was not possible to do a like-for-like replacement of veteran trees, which was why they were excluded from the calculations. The Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport commented that the Council was aiming to achieve biodiversity net gain on all metrics set out by DEFRA. Plans were in place to create new habitats along the NWL route along with maintaining existing ones.
- The Vice-Chair queried red rated risks in the risk register, as one of them was the A47 upgrade programme, which was currently facing a legal challenge in the Royal Courts of Justice. Officers stated there were a number of overlapping features between the A47 upgrade at Easton and the NWL. These were being managed together. At present a verdict was being awaited from the Court of Appeal. At present there was no requirement to make changes to the NWL, however if the circumstances were to change, amendments to the project would be considered.
- The Vice-Chair expressed agreement with the Cabinet Member for Finance's previous comments regarding the closer timescale of the project meaning that risks



could be calculated more accurately, but expressed concern about the Council receiving punitive fines if the project overran. Officers stated that the risk register had been updated to reflect that the outline business case was delayed. The timings of the project had been revised but not yet approved, as there were a number of issues beyond the control of the Council which would affect the programme. Contracts in Stage 1 included break clauses in the event of overruns.

- A Committee Member stated Route C was realigned a couple of years ago. The report from Cabinet dated the 4 December 2023 appeared to refer to another options appraisal report. The Committee Member asked if this report was available for scrutiny. Officers stated this report was unavailable at present due to it being subject to a review process but would eventually form part of the environmental statement.
- A Committee Member remarked that he had seen Freedom of Information requests appeared to show surveys for the route appraisal were incomplete, including ones relating to barbastelle bats. Officers stated there were unaware of incomplete surveys and requested the Committee Member to write to them with further information.
- A Committee Member stated there had been conflict in the media between the Council and the Norfolk Wildlife Trust (NWT) regarding datasets and asked officers if they received full datasets or reports from contractors when conducting surveys. Officers confirmed that the team had access to full datasets and that the Council had conducted ecological surveys in the project area. Consultants were appointed who would conduct the surveys, collate the data, and then report back to the Council. The Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport commented that the Council was aware of an independent ecologist conducting surveys along the NWL route but stressed that he felt confident that the Council's data would stand up to scrutiny. The Committee Member requested further clarification, stating that it appeared the Council had one dataset which would go through the planning application but that there would be an independent dataset which would conflict this. The Chair intervened at this point to advise that planning disputes could not take place in a Scrutiny Committee meeting. The NWT were welcome to attend a future Scrutiny meeting to advise Committee Members of their findings.
- A Committee Member commented that the biggest risk he had identified to the NWL was that the road might not be built at all, explaining that the NWL would cut down ambulance response times between his division and the Norfolk and Norwich University Hospital by over 20 minutes. It was necessary to scrutinise the project but the finances were being considered appropriately by officers.

8.4 Having considered the update to Cabinet on the 4 December, the Scrutiny Committee **RESOLVED** the following:

1. **PROVIDED** scrutiny around the development of the Western Link project and associated environmental and financial risks.
2. **DISCUSSED** the potential for further scrutiny at future meetings of the committee, and specific areas where additional scrutiny would be valuable.

## **9. Update on Provisional Local Government Settlement 2024-25**

- 9.1 The Scrutiny Committee received the annexed report (9).
- 9.2 The Cabinet Member for Finance introduced the report, which was intended to provide the Committee with support to scrutinise the annual budget setting process for the Council. The Cabinet Member remarked that parts of the report had now been superseded due to the announcement from the Secretary of State for Levelling Up of an additional £600m support package for councils across England the day before this meeting.
- 9.3 The level of Core Spending Power (CSP) was forecast to increase by 6.5% during this period. 59% of that increase would come from council tax, which was considered the highest percentage on record.
- 9.4 Officers stated the provisional settlement as set out in the Autumn Statement was broadly in line with expectations; however, the Council and other local districts were surprised by the size of the reduction in the services grant, as there was no forewarning about this. It was possible that some of the reductions would be rectified by yesterday's support package announcement. The Cabinet Member commented that only the national top-line figure was known at this stage, with no breakdowns as to how the £600m would be allocated across local authorities at present. £500m of the package was to be allocated to the Social Care Grant for use primarily by Children's Services, though Adult Social Care would also be permitted to access funds. An additional £15m funding for the Rural Services Delivery Grant was also included in the package.
- 9.5 The finalised Local Government Settlement was expected between the 31 January and the 8 February 2024. The Cabinet Member and officers would wait to see what the Council's allocation would be.
- 9.6 The following points were discussed and noted:
- A Committee Member welcomed the additional funding from the Rural Services Delivery Grant and asked if the Council was still an active member of the Rural Services Network (RSN). The Cabinet Member confirmed the Council still held membership of the RSN. There had been several recent meetings held on Teams with representatives from the network and the relevant government minister, where the Cabinet Member lobbied the Council's case against the urban/rural divide which often influenced funding decisions. The extra £15m funding was useful but did not change the formula. The Cabinet Member remarked that lobbying had proven highly effective as up until the support package announcement on the 24 January, there had only been one previous change in the Local Government Settlement after it had been announced, which illustrated just how extraordinary developments had been.
  - A Committee Member stated he was unsurprised at the government's support package given recent lobbying by council leaders and MPs and expressed hopes that lobbying would continue to push the government towards a multi-year funding

settlement for local authorities, as financial planning required more certainty. The Committee Member asked the Cabinet Member whether the Council's allocation for 2024/25 would be known before the February meeting of Full Council and whether any proposed budget cuts could be rescinded. The Cabinet Member agreed that a long-term funding settlement would be beneficial. There were encouraging signs from a meeting of the County Councils Network (CCN) yesterday, whether both government and opposition ministers expressed support for long-term funding settlements for local authorities. Once the new allocation was known, the provisional Budget could then be amended to take advantage of any changes from the support package.

- The Chair requested clarity regarding productivity plans, as the government's announcement yesterday referred to councils being obliged to produce such plans. The Cabinet Member commented that it seemed sensible to improve access to the Council's strategy and transformation agenda. Further work in this area would be conducted once guidance or templates from the government were available.

9.7 The Scrutiny Committee **RESOLVED** to **CONSIDER** the update provided by officers on the provisional local government finance settlement and the impact on the annual budget setting process.

## 10. Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme

10.1. The Scrutiny Committee received the report (10) which set out the current forward work plan for the Committee.

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

The meeting concluded at 12:28

**Cllr Steve Morphew, Chair  
Scrutiny Committee**



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