

Cabinet
3 May 2022
Local Member Questions

	Local Member Issues/Questions
7.1	<p>Question from Cllr Alexandra Kemp When it comes to Standards in Public Life, actions speak louder than words. I walked out of April's full Council Meeting out of respect to disadvantaged families in my Division, after the Chair refused an emergency debate on restoring Easter Holiday School Meals vouchers, that the Conservative Administration took away. South Lynn was particularly disadvantaged. The nearest "Lunch for Exercise" scheme was in North Lynn, two bus rides away. So I distributed free lunch packs to families in South Lynn church - mothers asked for food that did not require heating, afraid of the cost of gas. Can the Leader show some compassion and restore Vouchers for the Summer Holidays?</p> <p>Response from the Leader and Cabinet Member for Governance and Strategy Thank you for the question. Concerning free school meals vouchers we do understand how the increased cost of living is hitting many people harder now. We wouldn't want to see anyone go hungry and that is why our help will be to focus the Government's new hardship funding on all those in greatest need: we are developing a new scheme with the £6.7m we have been allocated that will have the depth and flexibility to reach a much broader range of people facing hardship.</p> <p>In addition, as you mentioned we have continued to run our holiday activity scheme, the Big Norfolk Holiday Fun Programme, which provided support and healthy food for 4,000 five to 16-year-olds over the Easter holidays.</p> <p>The Norfolk Assistance Scheme offers support for people who are struggling. The best way to apply to the scheme is through the website www.norfolk.gov.uk/NAS or if you do not have access to the internet, call 0344 800 8020. I would urge families who are struggling to feed their children, afford heating bills or have other financial worries to get in touch. The Scheme received 750 applications in the 2-week period of the Norfolk Easter Holidays, 315 of which were people with children, and the families are now receiving the support they need.</p>
7.2	<p>Question from Cllr Stuart Dark As Cabinet members are aware, NCC and Kings Lynn and West Norfolk Borough Council have worked closely together on numerous projects benefiting residents in the West of the County. I, as Leader of that Council, thank the administration and officers at NCC for that ongoing interest and support.</p> <p>As part of our regular dialogue, the Leader is aware of the ongoing serious concern that many local residents have regarding the proposed large commercial Incinerator at Wisbech, just outside Norfolk and in very close proximity to Kings Lynn Borough. Given this, would the Leader elaborate on the County's position to this particular proposal, to, if possible, alleviate some of that concern?</p> <p>Response from the Leader and Cabinet Member for Governance and Strategy I'd like to join Cllr Dark in thanking officers across both the County Council and the Borough Council of King's Lynn and West Norfolk for their continued work on projects and initiatives which have, and will continue to, benefit residents in the west of Norfolk.</p>

	<p>I'm aware that a Development Consent Order application for this facility is due to be submitted to the Secretary of State soon and once received the County Council will give its response as a statutory consultee. But I do understand the serious concerns being raised by local residents about this.</p> <p>As part of the regular dialogue between Cllr Dark and myself it has been emphasised that the current capacity of the waste disposal chain is sufficient, and there are ambitious environmental plans to reduce waste levels across King's Lynn and West Norfolk in future years. Based on this information as a consequence the county Council can, and will be, stating its opposition to the proposed energy from waste facility in Wisbech.</p>
7.3	<p>Question from Cllr Saul Penfold With the May half term on the horizon will Norfolk County Council commit now to the reintroduction of school meal vouchers to prevent the need for last-minute community action to feed hungry children?</p> <p>Response from the Cabinet Member for Children's Services We will be launching a new scheme on the 6 May reflecting the new Household Support Fund allocation for Norfolk. This is based on supporting a wider group of Norfolk's residents, who may be facing hardship due to the increased cost of living. The new scheme will run in addition to the continued support provided by the Norfolk Assistance Scheme.</p>
7.4	<p>Question from Cllr Sharon Blundell Residents have been telling me that the Big Holiday fun activities have been far from fun. Some clubs did not provide food, parents couldn't get codes from their school, not all children could get food, clubs were not suitable for children with disabilities/special educational needs and young carers were unable to attend. Will you apologise for leaving some children, who needed Council help, hungry over Easter?</p> <p>Response from the Cabinet Member for Children's Services We've had some great initial feedback about the activities on offer and we'd encourage those who have raised concerns with you to let us know, so that we can look into these with the specific schools and providers.</p> <p>All families experiencing financial hardship during Easter had access to the Council's Norfolk Assistance Scheme where families eligible for free school meals were prioritised for support, including support for food and also wider living costs.</p> <p>The team at Active Norfolk worked with more than 70 providers to deliver the Big Norfolk Holiday Fun programme over Easter, as part of the wider support available for children and families. They have delivered a range of activities providing children with the opportunity to keep active over school holidays through participating in free, enriching and fun activities, with lunch provided.</p> <p>The team is gathering feedback from children, parents and providers to help further develop the scheme going forward, including ensuring the opportunities are</p>

	<p>promoted widely to children through schools and that provision is as inclusive and accessible as possible.</p>
7.5	<p>Question from Cllr Rob Colwell Will Norfolk County Council join other stakeholders with financial assistance to begin habitat restoration of Gaywood River, Norfolk's most polluted river in 2021 according to data published by Anglian Water and considered by The Rivers Trust?</p> <p>Response from the Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste The poor condition of the Gaywood is a matter of great concern. This relatively short river, only 12 miles long from its source to where it joins the Ouse at Kings Lynn has been much modified, over time, from its natural state. To effectively deliver a habitat restoration scheme will require a whole river catchment approach. This will need investment and partnership working with several agencies and many landowners/managers in the area. Norfolk County Council has been involved in the past with this type of partnership working and currently with supporting restoration work on other north Norfolk rivers like the Glaven, Stiffkey and Hun and has brought in significant funding. I will ask the Council's Environment Team to contact the Norfolk Rivers Trust and the Water Alliance (Inland Drainage Board) to see if we can assist them in improving the condition of the Gaywood river.</p> <p>Second Question from Cllr Rob Colwell Whilst police have stepped up their patrols, what action can be taken and reassurance given to concerned residents in King's Lynn who report increased use of dangerous mini motorbikes on Norfolk County Council paths and lanes. Spring Lane, Gaywood a particular problem?</p> <p>Response from the Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport Thank you for the question. I understand that such activity on paths and lanes can cause great disturbances to communities and users of these paths and lanes. I am glad that the Police have increased their patrols and hopefully this will have the desired effect of addressing this issue</p>
7.6	<p>Question from Cllr Lucy Shires How does the council keep count of how many private family arrangements are made, whilst a case is open to Norfolk Children's Services?</p> <p>Response from the Cabinet Member for Children's Services We do not measure private family arrangements as by very nature, they are made outside of our intervention and not at our request. If made at the service's request they become placements and temporary foster care approval will be sought</p> <p>Second Question from Cllr Lucy Shires I'm receiving lots of correspondence from our Special Guardians. Why is there no public policy explaining how decisions are made regarding Special Guardians Allowance including what information is available on how many placements the council thinks might fail due to financial hardship?</p> <p>Response from the Cabinet Member for Children's Services</p>

	<p>Special Guardianship allowances and discretionary support is set out in legislation and Statutory Guidance, which defines what NCC and all other LAs should consider in supporting Special Guardians – the legal framework includes Children Act 1989 Section 1, 2 and 3, also set out in Special Guardianship Regulations 2005; Special Guardianship (Amendment) 2016 as well as the Statutory Guidance on Special Guardianship.</p>
7.7	<p>Question from Cllr Brian Watkins</p> <p>A report by the County Council Network has warned that the Government has seriously underestimated the cost of its adult social care reforms. They have warned that there could be large numbers of care homes closures and bed shortages when the reforms are introduced. There is widespread concern that there will inevitably be serious consequences for councils, providers, and most importantly for those who rely on that care. What response does the Cabinet member intend to make on behalf of this Council?</p> <p>Response from the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care, Public Health and Prevention</p> <p>Thank you for your question.</p> <p>The report referenced in the question (available here) by the County Council Network (CCN), and undertaken independently by Healthcare market specialists LaingBuisson, does indeed reference a potential national shortfall in the funding of two aspects of the Governments Adult Social Care reforms – namely those related to proposals to allow private payers (self-funders) to ask councils to arrange care on their behalf at a presumed lower local authority negotiated fee rate and the intention to introduce a new 'Fair Cost of Care'. We welcome this independent assessment, and indeed other assessments now being undertaken such as those by our strategic partner.</p> <p>Social care and housing are very much inter-connected and therefore at the right time, and under the right circumstances, we recognise the value and importance of both residential and home based services in supporting Norfolk's residents. This Council however does also recognise there should be a bridge between these services, and therefore continues to stimulate the market for alternatives such as our £29m investment in Independent Living housing that will supplement these existing services, and provide alternative preventative capacity.</p> <p>Our commissioners are actively continuing to shape our important care markets to ensure they provide quality services, that enable choice within efficient and sustainable markets. There will be an intense focus on our support to the Care market during 2022/23 with Cabinet due to receive reports on quality improvement, the publication of our market position statement and finally our response to governments requirement to submit a cost of care exercise and market sustainability plan. It will be this latter report that will outline our plans to try to address some of the issues described within the CCN publication. At present we are proactively working with our care providers, and Norfolk's care association NorCA, to develop both of these key plans.</p> <p>As a Council we very much welcome the reforms to Social Care being brought forward by Government. However, it still remains important that all new burdens placed on Local Government, including this reform, are fully funded by Central</p>

	<p>Government and we continue to work with the County Councils Network, the Local Government Association and the Association of Directors of Social Care to lobby the Government on these very important issues.</p> <p>Second question from Cllr Brian Watkins Eaton Primary School does not have any double yellow lines to prevent parking close by, and all attempts to make it safe for children to walk and cycle to school safely have not yet met with a satisfactory response. What can the school expect from the County Council by way of them introducing appropriate parking restrictions?</p> <p>Response from the Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport I am sorry to hear of the issues concerning parking outside Eaton Primary School. The County Council are aware that introducing parking restrictions in localised areas especially around schools can lead to parking being displaced into side roads where currently parking problems do not exist. As such additional parking restrictions can adversely impact adjacent residents so it is important to strike a balanced approach when dealing with parking outside schools. To mitigate against issues caused by displaced parking, the wider area around the school would need to be reviewed to establish the most appropriate solution.</p> <p>Managing parking around schools should be a multi-stakeholder approach, with the School, Parents, the County Council, Police, and residents all taking an active role. A good example of this is the School Streets trials which are due to begin at the start of May in several locations in Norfolk. This trial will see the roads outside the schools in question closed to general traffic when children arrival and leave school. The closures are manned by volunteers from the school or local community. Funding for the trial is already committed but should it be successful the initiative could be rolled out to other schools in Norfolk.</p>
7.8	<p>Question from Cllr Maxine Webb The government says its Holiday Activities and Food programme responds to the “holiday experience gap” that exists for children from low-income households. Shockingly, during the Easter holidays I heard from over 70 eligible families of children with SEND who couldn’t attend an activity and who therefore went without the food and support they should have received.</p> <p>Without denying the lived experience of these families, will the Cabinet Member for Children’s Services guarantee that ALL eligible children, including those with SEND, are equally able to benefit in future, and to provide the voucher equivalent of one meal a day to any child without a place?</p> <p>Response from the Cabinet Member for Children’s Services The Big Norfolk Holiday Fun team at Active Norfolk is keen to understand why some families felt unable to attend holiday activities over Easter, and there will be an opportunity for families to provide feedback through a survey being issued to those taking part and opportunities for further discussion with parents. As indicated in my reply to Cllr Blundell, there is a focus on ensuring all Big Norfolk Holiday Fun provision is inclusive and accessible as possible, recognising that some activities</p>

	<p>may not be accessible for some with certain needs due to the nature of the activity. Providers are happy to talk to parents/carers should families want to discuss their child's needs.</p> <p>As part of the Big Norfolk Holiday Fun programme, we have encouraged providers who are more specialist to deliver activities, alongside the requirement for all Big Norfolk Holiday Fun provision to be as accessible as possible. Securing a breadth of providers across the county continues to be a focus for the team, so that we can build up a strong network of local organisations able to offer Big Norfolk Holiday Fun activities safely and in line with the Department for Education's (DfE) requirements.</p> <p>The Big Norfolk Holiday Fun scheme is funded by the Department for Education and funding cannot be used to provide food support vouchers for children not participating in activities, but we will be launching our next phase of support for residents in hardship on the 6 May.</p>
7.9	<p>Question from Cllr Terry Jermy Could the Cabinet Member for Children's Services confirm how many children were eligible for Free School Meals in my Division at the beginning of the Easter holidays this year, how many places on the Big Norfolk Holiday Fun Scheme were offered in my Division, how many of those were booked and how many children actually attended them?</p> <p>Response from the Cabinet Member for Children's Services There were 908 children aged 5-16 eligible for means tested free school meals in Thetford schools at the start of the Easter holidays. The team secured 5 providers in the Thetford area to run Big Norfolk Holiday Fun activities over the Easter holidays. Between them these providers offered 1060 activity days with spaces for up to 310 children and young people to take part in four days of activities. The team at Active Norfolk are still collecting data on bookings and attendances for the Easter holidays.</p>
7.10	<p>Question from Cllr Mike Smith-Clare If the administration continues to refuse to reinstate vouchers, what measures have been put in place to ensure no children in Norfolk who would usually be in receipt of free school meals go hungry during the Jubilee half term?</p> <p>Response from the Cabinet Member for Children's Services In addition to the continued support provided by the Norfolk Assistance Scheme for families experiencing hardship we will be launching a new scheme on the 6 May based on the new Household Support Fund allocation for Norfolk focused on the needs of residents in meeting the cost of living crisis.</p>
7.11	<p>Question from Cllr Brenda Jones The CQC rating consistently show Norfolk County Council to be the worst performing social care provider in the country compared to other councils who have experienced similar challenges through underfunding and the pandemic. What is the cabinet doing to close the huge gap between Norfolk and the best performing councils?</p>

	<p>Response from the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care, Public Health and Prevention</p> <p>Thank you for your question.</p> <p>It is of course incorrect to say that the County Council is the worst performing social care provider in the country, care is provided by independent businesses, as I am sure that you are aware.</p> <p>The Council is supporting Norfolk's independent care providers to improve the quality of their provision through the payment of the highest fee uplift in five years – an above average inflation increase of 6%, increasing the quality teams – allowing for a more intense challenge and support function and investment in recruitment in the whole of the Care Sector.</p> <p>The full list of actions are detailed in the reports to the People and Communities Select Committee held last September and the Performance Improvement Group held in January. The Council is leading a system wide programme of improvement, supported by NorCA, across the emerging Integrated Care System to accelerate and drive improvement. The outputs from this will form proposals for the Care Quality Strategy and Framework for Norfolk, which will be discussed by Cabinet in June and will be part of the agenda for the new Integrated Care System.</p>
7.12	<p>Question from Cllr Steve Morpew</p> <p>The internal challenge mechanism the cabinet claims to be robust has resulted in what they admit is duplication and excessive layers of management. How much could the budget gap have been reduced if there had been earlier intervention?</p> <p>Response from the Cabinet Member for Finance</p> <p>Thank you for your question. The County Council has a robust and well-established process for annual budget setting, with a demonstrable track record of producing a deliverable, balanced budget.</p> <p>All organisations inevitably change and develop over time, and it is therefore appropriate to periodically review and reassess the structures and resources that are required to deliver organisational objectives in as efficient, effective and economical manner as possible. This is not to say that individual departments and service areas have not restructured or undertaken reviews of their own in recent years. On the contrary, the Council is a continuously evolving organisation as it changes in order to respond to demand, funding and other pressures, but there has not been a fundamental "whole organisation" review completed for more than ten years. In particular, the pandemic, and the Council's response to it, has demanded significant and rapid organisational changes over the last two years. Now, as we move into the post-pandemic recovery period, the time is right for a rigorous review of the whole Council as set out in detail in the report considered by Cabinet in April 2022.</p> <p>While it is too early to say definitively what the level of savings delivered by the review will be, the April report to Cabinet has identified that savings in the order of £15-20m could be achieved. This will need to be validated as one of the first actions undertaken by our specialist partner once they are appointed. It would however be</p>

	<p>unreasonable to automatically assume that any or all of these savings could necessarily have been delivered earlier, particularly in the context of the organisation's focus on responding to the pandemic. Nevertheless, it is clear that savings at the level estimated would have a material impact on closing the 2023-24 Budget gap and therefore it is right to undertake this review now.</p> <p>Supplementary question from Cllr Steve Morpew Will the Cabinet open up the budget challenge process wider to include non-Cabinet members and report the options considered and conclusions for wider debate rather than bringing a single take it or leave it option to council in the budget?</p> <p>Response from the Cabinet Member for Finance The budget challenge process enables Cabinet to explore the options available within different services to contribute to setting a balanced budget for the year. In this way the budget challenge meetings represent part of the Council's budget and strategy formulation process, and they are not decision-making meetings. As such it would not be appropriate to open these to a wider audience. There are however a number of other points within the budget setting process where wider member input is sought and welcomed. For the 2023-24 Budget this will include two instances of engagement with Select Committees (planned for May 2022 and November 2022), as well as opportunities to examine budget proposals within Scrutiny Committee. In fact, Scrutiny Committee has already had an opportunity to comment on the context for 2023-24 budget setting including the overall timetable and the proposed process at its last meeting in April 2022. In this context it is perhaps worth noting that the role of Cabinet is to recommend a balanced Budget to full Council, rather than putting forward a range of options.</p>
7.13	<p>Question from Cllr Chrissie Rumsby Why haven't the reports to this cabinet on FRS and carbon reduction in our companies been through select committees prior to coming to cabinet as these are surely worthy of greater member discussion and comment for cabinet to take account of?</p> <p>Response from the Leader and Cabinet Member for Governance and Strategy The role of Select Committees in shaping the Council's policies and strategies is very much valued.</p> <p>The report on the Fire and Rescue Community Risk Management Plan focusses on setting the timetable and overall process to develop a new three year plan. It is appropriate that Cabinet who are the Fire and Rescue Authority, approve the process to develop the new Plan. I agree it is important that the Select Committee has the opportunity to discuss this important strategy, and in the report it highlights that Infrastructure and Development Select Committee is programmed to consider the draft CRMP later this year; this will enable the Committee to comment on and shape it in advance of the start of a wider public consultation exercise. In addition, the Cabinet Member for Communities and Partnerships chairs a Strategic Development Oversight Group tasked with overseeing the work to develop the Plan. The group includes cross-party members as well as people from the Fire staff representative bodies. I understand you are a member of that group, which met during April to consider the proposals on the process and timetable before Cabinet.</p>

	Carbon reduction in our companies is an important process which has been set in train as a result of our Net Zero Strategy and Environment Policy, both of which have had cross-party member input at Select Committee, Scrutiny Committee and the Environmental Members' Oversight Group.
7.14	<p>Question from Cllr Emma Corlett What discussion, where and what progress has been made to ensure the Integrated Care Partnership is subject to proper, well-resourced Scrutiny arrangements?</p> <p>Response from the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care, Public Health and Prevention Thank you for your question.</p> <p>As I am sure that you are aware, the Integrated Care Partnership (ICP) is not a decision making body in respect of the commissioning and delivery of health and social care services within the ICS footprint of Norfolk and Waveney. That authority sits with the Integrated Care Board (ICB) Chaired by Patricia Hewitt responsible for the NHS and the Cabinets of Norfolk and Suffolk County Councils for social care. Scrutiny of the ICB and the Cabinets is the responsibility of the Health Overview Scrutiny Committees and Scrutiny Committees of Norfolk and Suffolk County Councils.</p> <p>A briefing has been prepared for the Chairs of the Scrutiny and Health Overview Scrutiny Committees at Norfolk County Council and a further briefing for the wider membership of Norfolk County Council is being planned for June 2022.</p>
7.15	<p>Question from Cllr Julie Brociek-Coulton Why didn't the cabinet member responsible for the sale of Holt Hall seek permission of the Secretary of State to sell it at a lower price so that it could be retained for the benefit of young people rather than sold to become a private home?</p> <p>Response from the Cabinet Member for Commercial Services and Asset Management When selling an asset which is no longer required, we are obligated to seek the 'best consideration' in accordance with Section 123 of the Local Government Act. Seeking permission from the Secretary of State to accept a substantially lower bid would have introduced a delay with no certainty of an outcome and could be subject to lengthy and costly legal challenge.</p> <p>This sale secures a significant capital receipt for Norfolk Tax payers. The additional £1m the purchaser is donating to support the education of children across the county, will be used to improve the provision for children who cannot attend school, due to ill health, exclusion or for any other reason. This will ensure a lasting legacy.</p>