

Cabinet
7 September 2020
Public & Local Member Questions

Agenda item 6 **Public Question Time**

6.1 Question from Cavan Stewart

There is a problem on Quebec Rd and Wolfe Rd in Norwich where the speed limit is currently 30 mph. The danger of speeding traffic is acute outside Lionwood Primary. A recent petition that was carried out this year shows that 189 people are in favour of reducing the speed limit and asking for other traffic calming measures. Forty-three of the signatories were teachers and assistants at the Junior School. With this in mind, would the Council implement an immediate reduction of the speed limit to 20 mph and consider implementing additional traffic calming measures in this area before a serious incident occurs involving children and motor vehicles?

Response by the Cabinet Member for Highways Infrastructure & Transport

The Highway Network Safety team have reviewed this location and have confirmed that a 20mph limit would be appropriate on Quebec Road and Wolfe Road, providing that there is sufficient support from the local community including residents. There is also a need to identify the funding required to implement the speed limit changes, which due to the required legal process, could be up to £6,000. One potential funding source is the Local Member Fund, so I would also encourage you to discuss this proposal with your local County Councillor. I encourage you to submit your petition to the Council for review to determine if further consultation will be required before a scheme can be considered for progression.

6.2 Question from Sandy Lysaght

The cabinet member does not support campaigns to end holiday hunger. He believes that parents have a responsibility to look after their children and use the benefits system already there to support those in genuine need. Has the cabinet member ever visited a food bank; or met families and children experiencing holiday hunger and food poverty in order to inform these views?

Response by the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care, Public Health & Prevention

Thank you for your question. I have always thought that it is important to consider genuine need before committing taxpayers money to any project. I was asked to support a blanket scheme to give money or vouchers to people for their children's lunches during school holidays, whether they needed it or not, without any checks or balances. I am disappointed that Cllr. Smith-Claire doesn't feel the same way. Given the facts of the situation I have not needed to visit a food bank to make an informed decision.

6.3 Supplementary question from Sandy Lysaght

What does the cabinet member of Adult Social Care mean by 'genuine need' in his response to a request for support to end holiday hunger?

Response by the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care, Public Health & Prevention.

Thank you for your question. "Genuine need" means exactly what it says, I cannot think of a simpler way to put the phrase

6.4 Question from Mr Tim Jones

Given that as far back as April meat processing plants across America and Europe

were identified as Coronavirus hotspots and given the amount of research explaining why this would logically be the case (see, for example, Middleton, Reintjes and Lopes' "Meat plants - a new frontline in the Covid-19 pandemic" from July 2020), why were procedures not put in place at Banham Poultry in Attleborough to prevent the outbreak there before it occurred?

Response by the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care, Public Health & Prevention

Thank you for your question. The guidance to meat processors issued as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic is very comprehensive. It is the responsibility of the firms themselves to implement them, this is no different from other countries across Europe and America. Any questions relating to the prevention measures at Banham Poultry should be directed to the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) who are responsible for reviewing the procedures.

Agenda item 7 Local Member Issues/Questions

7.1 Question from Cllr Sandra Squire.

Having witnessed a road rage incident outside my house a few weeks ago, where Highways personnel were verbally abused by a driver and then deliberately driven at while resurfacing the road, I've been told this is a common experience for those working on our roads. Would the Cabinet member agree it is totally unacceptable for staff or contractors to have to experience this and what would he suggest could be done to protect them.

Response by the Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure & Transport

Fortunately, the incidents of road rage in Norfolk are rare. However, Roadworkers are often subject to bad language & have had items thrown at them. The traffic management staff are trained to stand back & not incite confrontation. If they are threatened, they take down the vehicle registration & report the incident to the police. In known problem areas where issues have been previously reported, the Council request a minimum of 2 traffic management staff and body cameras. Signs are also provided which state "CCTV cameras recording on this site".

7.2 Question from Cllr Alexandra Kemp

Climate Change & Public Health

Hardings Pits Doorstep Green won the Norfolk Biodiversity Award and, with the high flood-risk grassland east and south, is suitable for - a County Wildlife Site; mitigation for: Climate Change, Natura 2000 sites, and Lynn's 26-hectare Green Infrastructure Deficit - but not development. The Environment Agency advises against ground-floor accommodation, due to rapid inundation-zone flood risk.

Will the Leader halt all ill-advised traffic orders that : facilitate environmentally-unsafe development; break County's £5.3 million funding agreement by bringing considerable traffic on the bus-and-cycle lane; slow down strategic Bus Travel; risk public safety on 10,000 residents' only safe route, that encourages Active Travel for public health.

Response by the Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure & Transport

The proposed scheme and traffic order (promoted by the Borough Council and delivered by the County Council), is to enable access to commercial premises, derestricting the southernmost 125m for that purpose only. The proposals also involve constructing an additional length of footway & cycleway where none currently exists. The remainder of Hardings Way is not affected, so the route will remain a key bus, cycling and walking route.

Therefore, there are no plans to halt the traffic orders.

7.3 Question from Cllr Dan Roper

Is there a case for delaying significant new capital expenditure on the fabric of county hall and on site car parking until there is greater clarity on the likelihood of local government reorganisation in Norfolk?

Response by the Cabinet Member for Commercial Services & Asset Management

There is not a case to delay the capital expenditure to the County Hall Campus, as it has had historic underinvestment since its original construction, meaning for example that the Council Chamber is not properly accessible for disabled Councillors, staff or residents.

The County Council has also had a clear strategy of consolidating functions and activities onto the campus, looking to make the best use of the estate – for example in moving multi-agency partners such as the MASH team from expensive accommodation in Vantage House into County Hall. This process is continuing with the consolidation of Carrow House into County Hall, bringing Coroners and a number of frontline social work teams into County Hall. These moves help generate capital receipts, but also real revenue efficiencies for the County Council, as well as a better environmental footprint.

In order to facilitate this, the County Council does need to make sure that the infrastructure at County Hall is able to support a higher level of utilisation and provides a modern flexible workspace.

Local Government re-organisation has had a chequered history and there is no clear timescale or indeed agreement on what a future structure may look like. A similar argument could be made for delaying decisions around 'health and social care integration' or any number of white papers. Local Government needs to make efficiency savings now and these changes enable those savings.

Whatever the outcome of Local Government review, it is likely that County Hall will need to remain as a key public sector hub not least given its local listing, historic grounds and the restrictions on the land. As such the works that are being planned, will allow for a well utilised, flexible building serving Norfolk residents in the future

7.4 Question from Cllr Tim Adams

People with disabilities tell us that they have lost all respect for how they have been treated by the council over the last 2 years. What will the Cabinet member do personally to seek a change in this view?

Response by the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care, Public Health & Prevention

I am sorry to hear that, change is often difficult for any of us, even if it is for the better. I am happy to give my word that we will continue do everything that we can to give the best service possible with the money that we have available. This has been my driving principle since I became the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Services.

7.5 Question from Cllr Brian Watkins.

What is your vision for a sustainable transport policy?

Response by the Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure & Transport

You will know that the county council is reviewing its Local Transport Plan, which

will set out the county council's transport strategy and policies, taking a medium-term view over the next 15 years. The LTP is the county's overarching transport strategy and will set out how the county council will take forward and deliver the principal ambitions of the council and our partners including the county council plan and the LEP's Integrated Transport Strategy and Economic Strategy. It will also show how the council will secure and deliver the necessary transport system to meet the ambitions of stakeholders in the public and private sectors.

The plan will take account of environmental, economic and social factors in order that a truly sustainable transport policy can be set out. Cllr Watkins is on the Member working group for the plan's review and will be able to help shape the plan before it comes to Members to agree.

In the meantime, the county council continues to devise and implement a range of transport schemes that balance the needs of the environment, economy and social issues whilst meeting the county council's overall objectives.

7.6 Question from Cllr Steffan Aquarone

How valid were the comments made by George Freeman MP that the Task and Trace of the Covid outbreak at Banham Poultry has been too slow and ineffectual and what actions are being taken to protect the rest of Norfolk from this outbreak?

Response by the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care, Public Health & Prevention.

Thank you for your question. It is always interesting to hear from George Freeman, and I have no doubt he was sincere in his comments. I am now sure he is properly up to speed with what has happened since the start of the outbreak.

Following notification of the first positive case on 21 August staff who were in close contact with staff member were immediately asked to self-isolate and get tested. This resulted in further 7 cases confirmed on 24 August and testing was put in place for 376 workers who worked in the same section of the Banham Poultry plant. Subsequent extensive testing has taken place with all staff at Banham Poultry and their households, being asked to self-isolate in accordance with required procedures.

Norfolk County Council notified the Government's Covid-19 Joint Biosecurity Centre and staff from both the Department of Health and Public Health England have been attending local meetings to advise on containment of the virus. A daily Incident Management Team meeting chaired by Dr Smith, Director of Public Health, of lead local, regional and national agencies along with Banham Poultry management continues to monitor and take action on the situation. Mobile testing units are now in place in Great Yarmouth, Norwich and Attleborough to encourage wider community testing. In addition to the NHS Contact Tracing service to increase local contact tracing capacity, it was decided to bring in Essex and Southend Contact Tracing Service.

The risk to the wider population of Norfolk has been assessed as small and there is no evidence that the outbreak has spread further than Banham Poultry.

7.7 Question from Cllr David Harrison

If a child is found to have Covid in a school in Norfolk what would be the process for dealing with this safely and effectively?

Response by the Cabinet Member for Children's Services

There are detailed procedures in place and clear steps for schools to follow in the event of a child being poorly at school or testing positive for COVID-19.

If a child becomes poorly at school, they are isolated from others as soon as and parents are asked to collect child asap. The whole household then has to isolate and get tested. If a child is positive, they have to self-isolate for at least 10 days from the date of the test and until temperature returns to normal. Remaining family members isolate for a further 14 days from the date of the positive test. Schools have been provided with a flow chart, contact points and template letters to parents. Every school is being supplied with a small number of home test kits that they can supply to families if children are in need of a test. These will be distributed to Norfolk schools next week. If more than two children or two related cases to a child test positive this will be tested as an outbreak and covered by the local outbreak plan.

7.8 Question from Cllr Mike Smith-Clare

In the light of comments in the recent past by two cabinet members about responsibility for hungry children in Norfolk will the Leader set out what the administration's policy towards ensuring parents have the wherewithal to feed their children, how shortfalls in their ability to feed their children are tackled by this council that is responsible for the well being of children, and how the council will deal with the consequences of Norfolk children becoming malnourished?

Response by the Leader

Children's Services alongside colleagues across the County Council have been working with vulnerable families including where providing food for their children has been identified as a worry. During the summer term our education team worked closely with schools and education providers to ensure that families whose children were now eligible for free school meals were able to access this support and food was provided. This included during the summer holiday period following the government decision to extend free school meals through July and August, including via the voucher scheme. In each district Children's Services have enabled families to access support including via the Norfolk Assistance Scheme and linked closely with food banks and other organisations that can provide short term assistance to families. Where Children are at risk of harm including possible malnourishment the Children's Advice and Duty Service (CADS) continue to work with professionals across the county to ensure that these children are identified and a timely response provided which has including visiting children at home and making sure the right support is in place.

7.9 Question from Cllr Chrissie Rumsby

A recent Food Foundation report has found that 5.1 million people in the UK are living in households with children who have experienced food insecurity since the start of the pandemic. What has the cabinet member done to ensure those affected are helped and that this number doesn't increase during a possible second spike?

Response by the Cabinet Member for Children's Services

The children of Norfolk eligible for Free School Meals have been supported

throughout the pandemic and over the school summer holidays through the voucher scheme and some locally organised arrangements. I have made it my business to monitor and understand that this programme is running well for children and families. As children return to school next week this support for them continues. It is not the role of a Children's Services to ensure that all children are fed, but to hold officers to account for their part in ensuring that programmes such as Free Schools Meals are appropriately delivered. During the pandemic I am pleased to report that we offered an instant checking service and staff worked around the clock to process new applications to ensure that children could be included in the Free School Meals voucher scheme.

7.10 Question from Cllr Brenda Jones

What evaluation and assessment has been done of the numbers of staff that need to be based at county hall and their modes of travel to and from the campus given the experience of remote working, taking account of operational effectiveness, overall costs and impact on carbon emissions?

Response by the Cabinet Member for Commercial Services & Asset Management

An analysis of the numbers was provided as part of the recent planning application, this included the increased number of visitors expected to the site. A summary of the demand data was provided to the Councillor in May 2020.

7.11 Question from Cllr David Rowntree

The cabinet member for Children congratulated Norfolk's children on their exam results but many young people suffered undue anxiety, disappointment and a change to their future plans due to the Government's disastrous algorithm strategy for deciding exam results. What would the cabinet member like to say to those young people about that and what did he do to address their concerns?

Response by the Cabinet Member for Children's Services

It was very regrettable that the initial position with regard to examination outcomes caused some distress to young people. Of course, I want to say how very sorry I am that they and their families experienced this. No – one would want to cause young people this kind of upset and like all of us I was relieved when it was overturned and teachers' assessments of their pupils and students were used to form their grades. This was a central government decision which, although it must have seemed too long for young people, was turned around relatively quickly. I know that our schools, colleges and officers have been working tirelessly to support those young people who may have been affected. Our post 16 'Keeping in Touch' team will continue to follow up on every young person who does not register somewhere in one form or another- in September. The contact team will telephone every young person who does not appear to have signed up for a next step and work with them to identify an appropriate pathway to continue their education, training or work place ambitions.

7.12 Question from Cllr Colleen Walker

Extended learning through outdoor study visits are acknowledged as providing invaluable personal and social developmental opportunities. Can the cabinet

member outline the educational and social value provided by Holt Hall and Whitlingham Adventure Centre and explain the importance of these outdoor resources in offering safe and varied learning options for schools during the ongoing Covid Pandemic?

Response by the Cabinet Member for Children's Services

Holt Hall and Whitlingham Adventure are part of the council's education traded services. Up until the pandemic both were open to school parties. When the national lockdown occurred in March both sites were closed. School trips and residential visits were barred from taking place under COVID restrictions. Just before the school summer holidays officers surveyed Norfolk schools and asked for an indication of the impact of prioritising certain activities – e.g. support for the curriculum, and clusters, and de-prioritising other provision for example the use of Holt Hall and Whitlingham. Following a return from over 90% of Norfolk schools approximately 4% expressed some concern about the continued closure of Holt Hall and Whitlingham for the forthcoming term. Holt Hall remains closed therefore and we are ensuring the outdoor learning advice and guidance is focused on schools and their sites for safe learning. I fully recognise the important role that learning outside a classroom can play and know that many Norfolk schools make use of outdoor learning space, and programmes like Forest schools to support social and emotional learning. Right now, Holt Hall is not a place where children need to go for residential or day visits, as schools will be limiting their transport requirements to those which are essential to get to and from school. The priority is providing learning on school sites as per the government's clear guidelines and expectations. Whitlingham has previously been open to the public and used for school parties and also at this time remains closed. This decision is constantly under review, however, at this time there is no consideration that it will be re-opened for school parties in the near future. Encouraging learning to take place outside the classroom is important and we will continue to promote the outdoor curriculum opportunities that schools can provide.

7.13 Question from Cllr Julie Brociek-Coulton

Marcus Rashford, Aldi, Asda, Co-op, Deliveroo, FareShare, Food Foundation, Iceland, Kellogg's, Lidl, Sainsbury's, Tesco and Waitrose all support expanding an existing school holiday food and activities programme to support all children on free school meals in all areas of England instead of the current 50,000 children that are helped. Can Cllr Borrett explain why he does not support tackling holiday hunger too?

Response by the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care, Public Health & Prevention

Thank you for your question. I have always thought that it is important to consider genuine need before committing taxpayers money to any project. I was asked to support a blanket scheme to give money or vouchers to people for their children's lunch in the holidays whether they needed it or not, without checks or balances. I am disappointed that you Cllr. Brociek-Coulton do not feel the same way, given your awareness of the many demands on public funds.

7.14 Question from Cllr Emma Corlett

The Leader has promised cooperation with DNNG and other groups in lobbying for

additional resources for disabled people in Norfolk. Will he detail what steps he has taken to organise this cooperation, how it has manifested itself in practice and what progress has been made?

Response by the Leader

I have recently corresponded with the DNNG reiterating that it remains the case that until we see the Social Care Green paper there is little that can be discussed further at this time. Having said that we are supporting the campaign lead by the CCN and LGA to get more funding into counties and unitaries for all the peoples services we are responsible for.

Once the Social Care Green paper is published, I welcome further discussions with the DNNG about how any changes that affect them are implemented in Norfolk.

7.15 Question from Cllr Steve Morphew

It is clear the majority of councillors has either declined to accept the allowances increase or will be using it for community purposes and would be prepared to vote against taking it if asked. Will the Leader now join me in taking a motion to council this month reversing the decision to apply the 2.75% increase to councillor allowances backdated April and ensure the increase is not included in the September payroll run for councillors pending the council meeting on 21 September?

Response by the Leader

The recommendation to link any increase in Councillor allowances to staff increases ensures that we don't see the catch up in allowances that we have seen in the past. As you say many members (including myself) will not be taking this year's, increase and it is up to each individual Councillor to make that decision.

Therefore, I do not agree that a motion is required.

7.16 Question from Cllr Chris Jones

If the government extends the ability of councils to increase the precept to pay for social care will the cabinet recommend doing so to council and what ceiling would be acceptable to them?

Response by the Leader

Any future guidance published by Government concerning Adult Social Care precepts would be considered at that time, until then we cannot make decisions based on speculation.

7.17 Question from Cllr Terry Jermy

Could the Cabinet member for transport confirm whether the timetable and costs for the Western Link have been impacted over the past few months due to COVID 19?

Response by the Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure & Transport

The Covid-19 pandemic is an unprecedented event with issues emerging all the time. However, over the past six months, the Government has repeatedly

highlighted the importance for infrastructure investment to help with the economic recovery. In May 2020, the Department for Transport (DfT) announced its approval for the building of the scheme to both complete the dual carriageway orbital route around Norwich and also relieve traffic congestion on local roads.

Now that the business case has been approved by central government, and Norwich Western Link has gained conditional entry into DfT's 'Large Local Majors' project funding programme, the team are now progressing the necessary design and environmental work to proceed to the next stage of the statutory approvals processes and start the procurement process.

This is slightly later than the original planned timescales, primarily due to the later approval of the business case by the DfT. A procurement exercise is currently underway which will provide more cost certainty for the scheme, and the project remains within the overall budget.

7.18 Question 1 from Cllr Danny Douglas

Does the cabinet member for transport and environment have sympathy for Mrs Susan West of Little Bethel Street in Norwich City Centre who has increased the use of her inhaler due to the deterioration of air quality linked to the increased amount of traffic congestion and does the cabinet member recognise this has been partly caused by road closures in Norwich City Centre and is damaging Norwich's economy and hampering access for emergency services of long periods of the day?

Response by the Cabinet Member for Highways Infrastructure & Transport

I have a great deal of sympathy for the health of all our County's residents and I am sorry to hear of Mrs West's situation, however I believe the increased congestion Cllr Douglas refers to has been caused primarily in relation to a road closure for a major new private development of student housing on the edge of the city centre.

Our recent emergency covid works in the city centre have been designed to take traffic out of the city centre and support the local economy.

We consult closely with all emergency services on the implementation of all highway measures and have taken steps to adjust signal timings at Chapelfield roundabout to improve traffic flow. No further issues have been reported so far and this area will continue to be monitored closely.

We firmly believe that new city centre accommodation and current highway projects will contribute to significant economic growth of the city centre in the longer term and many schemes featured in our forthcoming Transforming Cities proposals, such as the redevelopment of the St Stephens bus corridor are heavily focused on reducing air pollution in the city centre.

7.19 Question 2 from Cllr Danny Douglas

Can the cabinet member outline how he is monitoring the impact of the changes and roadworks in the city centre?

Response by the Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure & Transport.

Council officers continually monitor the impact of all changes and roadworks in the

city centre, by looking closely at traffic levels to identify any congestion hot spots and taking feedback on board from all those affected and taking action where necessary. This can be demonstrated in our continual adjustment of signage for temporary traffic management, adjustment of the signal timings at Chapelfield roundabout and through further adjustments such as the provision of additional loading bays and relaxing of loading restrictions to support residents and businesses in the St Benedict's / Exchange Street areas. We try to keep disruption to a minimum wherever possible, whilst balancing the needs of all users and ensuring our teams can work safely.

7.20 Question from Cllr Ed Colman

There is currently a lot of talk about the forthcoming Local Recovery and Devolution White Paper which, as I understand it will include possible Local Government Re-organisation guidelines. I read with great interest the County Council's Network's recent commissioned publication 'Making Counties Count'. Would the Leader please share his views on that publication's findings and whether he agrees with them

Response by the Leader

Making Counties Count explores the current and future role of counties in the context of the devolution of powers away from Whitehall, something I'm pleased to hear the Member has read and found of interest.

A fairer and more consistent approach to devolution across the country would ensure that central government should provide substantive powers and budgets to county authorities, such as Norfolk, enabling them to best address the economic impact of Coronavirus, and continue their leading role in promoting economic growth.

This consistent approach is critical, in my view, along with a national framework from government to best ensure a successful attempt to secure a deal. Whilst this report is excellent background we should still wait for the publication of the White Paper in the coming months in order to maximise the potential of any deal.

In terms of the financial benefits, the report found that single county unitaries deliver the greatest financial benefit, would be most understandable to the public, retain local identities and provide the most coherent geography to develop local economic recovery strategies. It clearly demonstrates that size and scale is a key driver towards these cost savings, better service delivery and a coherent approach to economic development and recover.

Furthermore, the publication outlines that there would be new powers for town and parish councils to focus on local issues, with local representation and citizens voices being delivered through new local governance arrangements.

I would encourage Members to read the report.