

Cabinet
6 September 2021
Local Member Questions

Agenda item 7	Local Member Issues/Questions
7.1	<p>Question from Cllr Alison Thomas The NSFA (Norfolk Strategic Flood Alliance) refers to the education and encouragement of riparian owners to undertake essential maintenance works. What action will be taken against riparian owners if they fail to respond to education and encouragement and complete essential work before this coming winter?</p> <p>Response from the Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste To reduce the risk of flooding Norfolk Strategic Flooding Alliance is encouraging riparian owners to work towards an effective watercourse system through a process of co-operation, liaison, advice and assistance wherever possible. Alongside this, the NSFA has set up a working group to look at catchment wide options for improving the co-ordination of maintenance regimes for rivers and watercourses.</p> <p>However, under the Land Drainage Act 1991, Risk Management Authorities (RMAs) have the powers to serve notice on riparian owners, for the maintenance of proper flows or removal of any blockage to a watercourse. Should the riparian owner fail to do so, the RMAs have powers following their protocols and policies to take legal action and/or undertake the work themselves and recharge the costs to the riparian owner. Certain RMAs also have the powers to carry out maintenance on rivers and watercourses without the need to take enforcement action.</p> <p>The Council will try to resolve problems through discussion with the owners in the first instance and enforcement of legislation will only be used as the last resort.</p>
7.2	<p>Question from Cllr Jamie Osborne Following questioning at a recent briefing for new councillors, the county council admitted that the Local Transport Plan 4 would not be sufficient to cut carbon emissions from transport at the rate required to meet carbon targets and that more work would be needed to meet targets. Can the Cabinet Member confirm that he is aware that ambition for carbon in the Local Transport Plan must be increased?</p> <p>Response from the Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste The draft Local Transport Plan, which Cabinet agreed to recommend to Full Council for adoption, is quite clear in that it sets out that our policy is to achieve carbon neutrality across all sectors by 2030 in line with the Council's adopted environmental policy. The LTP includes a number of policies providing the direction for how this will be achieved in respect of local transport. The Local Transport Plan strategy will be accompanied by an Implementation Plan, which will be developed over the remainder of this year and the first half of 2022. This will set out the measures the council proposes to take to meet the ambitious target, and in line with the proposed strategy in the draft LTP.</p> <p>Supplementary Question from Cllr Jamie Osborne The Government's recent Decarbonising Transport plan requires councils to set out how local transport plans will deliver quantifiable carbon reductions in transport in line with national carbon budgets and net zero ambitions. Can the Cabinet member confirm that the Local Transport Plan 4 will now be fully reviewed against this requirement before going to Full Council for adoption?</p>

	<p>Response from the Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Transport</p> <p>The Local Transport Plan's Implementation Plan will set out how the council intends to deliver quantifiable carbon reductions, taking into account the differing transport requirements of different areas, in line with government's Decarbonising Transport plan.</p>
7.3	<p>Question from Cllr Brian Watkins</p> <p>With the strong possibility that the UK could face a further wave of the Covid-19 pandemic in the autumn, what contingency plans has the Council in place to deal with such an outcome?</p> <p>Response from the Leader and Cabinet Member for Governance and Strategy</p> <p>Norfolk County Council have robust business continuity plans in place across our services which are reviewed regularly. Where necessary these are implemented to ensure continuity of service to the Norfolk community. Our Local Outbreak Management Plan remains in place, with a strong focus on harm reduction and protection of the most vulnerable. Led by our Director of Public Health, the multi-agency Health Protection Board and also the Engagement Board work in partnership to implement our strategy. The Norfolk Resilience Forum maintains a Common Operating Picture across agencies and stands ready to step up should it be necessary.</p>
7.4	<p>Question from Cllr Dan Roper</p> <p>Over the past year, young people have been one of the group's hit hardest by the impact of the pandemic on the jobs market. That's why it is vitally important for them to have an effective transition into adulthood and employment. However, improving youth participation in education, employment and training can be complex and challenging, particularly for those with special educational needs, looked after children and low income groups.</p> <p>How does the Cabinet member feel that the Council can better understand these challenges, and ensure that the most effective levels of support can be provided?</p> <p>Response from the Cabinet Member for Children's Services</p> <p>Council officers have worked closely with schools and FE providers to identify those young people most at risk of becoming NEET at the end of year 11 and 12 so that early support can be targeted to them. Schools provided details of those most at risk from March onwards to enable Guidance advisers to make contact and provide information, advice and guidance and referral into provision. Young people home educated or missing education have been a specific focus and all have had contact from early in the Spring term. Other professional teams including those working with looked after children, youth offenders and SEN have provided bespoke transition support into post 16 pathways.</p> <p>We know from our engagement with young people through YABs and other participation and engagement networks that many young people are concerned about the impact of the pandemic on their education, and they have missed the 'normality and social contact' both with their peers and teachers. We know they are worried about what this means in terms of successfully gaining employment and they have talked about their worries of being seen as the 'covid generation'. We need to continue to use such forums and opportunities to engage with a range of young people and develop how we ensure that their views and insight is used to help inform</p>

	<p>the Council's and our partner's responses over the coming months.</p> <p>Throughout the pandemic post 16 providers have had regular contact with learners to check on their health and wellbeing, support their progress in learning and access to technology. Those young people most at risk of dropping out have been referred to the local authority for support; there has not been significantly higher levels during the pandemic of young people not completing their courses.</p> <p>Guidance Advisers undertook fortnightly health and welfare calls with the NEET cohort signposting to other professional services where appropriate. The Family Support Process was extended during the pandemic in order to target the 16–18-year-old cohort.</p> <p>Additional measures have been provided by the council to support young people's entry into apprenticeships which has included the Recruit Retrain and Reward initiative which provided subsidy to employers to recruit young people. To date there have been 136 applications from employers, 70% of which were for 16–18-year-olds.</p> <p>Other support measures have included NCC's role as a gateway provider for Kickstart, 315 approved placements as of July 2021. Although referral on to placements is via the DWP agreement has been reached for us to directly advertise opportunities to care leavers and young people with SEN and there is a guaranteed interview for care leavers applying for NCC placements.</p> <p>For Care Leavers the subgroup focused on the Education, Employment and Training element of the Corporate Parenting Strategy. So far they have been able to achieve guaranteed interview schemes with local NHS providers and NCC and have maintained a strong focus on apprenticeships in addition to the Kickstart programme. One example of this is the Social Work apprenticeship usually only offered to NCC employees (there are 20 places per year) which NCC now offers to Care Leavers too. Our first Care Leaver was successful at interview and took up a place in Jan 2021. There is also a strong focus on those cohorts of care leavers who often struggle to access EET, with new initiatives being trialled that are supporting young parents who are care leavers into work. We hope to be able to offer mentorships to young people to support them further with writing CVs, applying for work and reengaging with education. We also offer more practical support such as provision of a device and internet access when they are seeking employment or education/training and providing suitable interview clothing.</p>
7.5	<p>Question from Cllr Paul Neale</p> <p>The county council's Environmental Policy includes ambitions including supporting pollinators and greening our towns and cities. The council routinely uses controversial weedkiller glyphosate on roads, resulting in complaints from residents of biodiversity damage. Guidance from charity Plantlife recommends eliminating "the general use of herbicides. Their use encourages the development of vigorous, rank vegetation and a vicious cycle of spraying can develop, where costly herbicides are used repeatedly to control the same weeds again and again." The Natural Capital Compendium Assessment commissioned by the council recommends "working to increase species richness, abundance and ecological resilience" Will the council review its policy of using herbicides such as glyphosate on a routine basis?</p>

	<p>Response from the Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste</p> <p>Norfolk County Council takes a careful approach to the use of herbicides and pesticides across its estate, including highways, County Farms and other locations and one which is always led by national legislation and directives, including the Plant Protection Products (Sustainable Use) Regulations 2012.</p> <p>As laid out in the Pollinator Action Plan, the Council's approach to its Roadside Nature Reserves (RNRs) is to avoid the use of pesticides. Officers are currently working on a new policy with regard to the Council's use of herbicides and pesticides and this will be shared with the Environment Member Oversight Group in due course ahead of any review as part of the Council's overarching approach to its policy framework.</p> <p>In terms of the County's highway network, an approach that seeks to control weed growth is required because of the significant damage some weeds can cause to hard surfaces, including carriageways and footways. This damage is expensive to repair when compared to a proactive weed treatment and can cause increased hazards to pedestrians. The contractor employed by NCC currently uses herbicides which become inert on contact with soil, an approach which is approved for use by the HSE Chemicals Regulation Directorate.</p> <p>To support the Council's development of a new policy, highways officers are currently reviewing advice from Plantlife, looking at alternative methods to control weed growth, and best practice from other highway authorities.</p>
7.6	<p>Question 1 from Cllr Alexandra Kemp</p> <p>The Local Lead Flood Authority (LLFA) and Flooding Review need to respond to Anglian Water's request to work together to prevent the flooding and severe sewage back-up on Main Road Clenchwarton happening to homes near the chapel for the last 3 years.</p> <p>Anglian Water's recent service review found no damage, infiltration or problems with sewers.</p> <p>Regular clearing of ditches to the rear of the properties needs to be enforced. Highway gulleys need more maintenance and cleaning out. Anglian Water's proposed sealing of manhole covers to prevent local flooding could lead to flooding on the highways. Can the LLFA set up a meeting to plan an effective solution?</p> <p>Response from the Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste</p> <p>We will liaise with Anglian Water where their works may affect the Highways drainage assets. If improvements are considered necessary to the Highways drainage, we will seek to secure funding to progress those works.</p> <p>The powers and regulatory roles for ordinary watercourses in Clenchwarton fall to the King's Lynn Internal Drainage Board (IDB) and I understand the local group will be in contact with the IDB in regard to the ditch maintenance.</p> <p>The LLFA have no verified records of flooding that meets our thresholds for investigation on the Main Road in Clenchwarton and we have to prioritise our efforts where the flood risk and the impacts of flooding are the highest. However, we will</p>

	<p>liaise with the relevant organisations where necessary as their work progresses</p> <p>Question 2 from Cllr Alexandra Kemp Under the Rainbow Alliance, full Council had 10 minutes to Question each Committee Chair. But now all decision-making power is concentrated in the hands of just 10 County Councillor Cabinet Members, time for questions is cut to only 30 minutes. Only 3 minutes to question each Cabinet Member. As Cabinet Members have far greater decision making capacity, they should answer more questions. Last year's Council Chairman assured me about Council's return to proper question time when it meets in person. As the only County Councillor not in a political group, I set a high value on asking questions in Council. How will the Leader achieve this?</p> <p>Response from the Leader and Cabinet Member for Governance and Strategy Thank you for the question. As Cllr Kemp will be aware there are numerous avenues for all members to ask questions of Cabinet; at Full Council Meetings and Cabinet meetings. There is also provision in procedure 8.3 at full council to ask additional questions. I believe that what is currently set out in the Council's constitution is sufficient to allow Cabinet to be held to account via Public and Member questions and for Council business to proceed.</p>
7.7	<p>Question from Cllr Maxine Webb At the start of this academic year, how many children with an EHCP are awaiting a place in a a) Specialist School and b) Autism Specialist Resource Base</p> <p>Response from the Cabinet Member for Children's Services This is an important area to highlight as we continue to see ongoing pressure on specialist places. It is a national issue that we continue to raise with government and which we hope will be addressed by the SEN Review. As members will know, we are investing £120m to create 500 new specialist places in the county, but this will take time. The first of our new schools opens this month but even when that is complete we will still have children and young people awaiting places at special schools. At this point in the year it is difficult to be definitive about the precise number, but we expect it to be up to 500. All of these children will be offered a package of support while they wait and some will continue to have their needs met in mainstream schools, with extra funding We are also creating 100 new places in Specialist Resource bases with at least 50 new places starting this academic year; currently 13 pupils with an Education Health and Care Plan and autism diagnosis are awaiting places</p> <p>As part of our approach, we are working with schools to promote inclusion and reduce demand for Education, Health and Care Plans. There is particular pressure on places for children with social, emotional and mental health needs and by working with children and families earlier, we can help to prevent these needs from escalating and reduce some of the pressure on specialist provision.</p> <p>I completely understand the difficulties faced by any child and family who is waiting for this provision and know that Norfolk's children are among thousands in the same position nationally. We are investing significantly in local solutions and new approaches, but we need a national response to this issue.</p> <p>Supplementary question from Cllr Maxine Webb How many new permanent placements in each category will become available</p>

	<p>during this school year, through the opening of new provision as a result of the SEND Transformation Plan?</p> <p>Response from the Cabinet Member for Children's Services The opening dates, and details regarding cohorts, for the three new special schools are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Bure Park (Great Yarmouth)- opening September 2021</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ For Social Emotional & Mental Health difficulties (SEMH) ○ Boys age 5 to 16 ○ Total places 86 (initial cohort will be 30 within current academic year) • <u>Duke of Lancaster (Fakenham) – opening January 2022</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ For Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) ○ Boys and girls age 5 to 16 ○ Total places 96 (initial cohort will be 48 within current academic year) • <u>Easton (Name to Be Determined) – opening Spring Term 2023</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ For Complex Needs ○ Boys and girls age 3-19 ○ Total places 170 • A further 50 SRB places will open across the next academic year.
7.8	<p>Question from Cllr Mike Smith-Clare As the government has failed to publish cheaper school uniform guidance before the start of the new academic year; what has the cabinet member done to challenge this delay and support the unnecessary financial difficulties faced by numerous Norfolk families?</p> <p>Response from the Cabinet Member for Children's Services The Norfolk Assistance scheme (NAS) supports all Norfolk residents in financial crisis. One of the ways is in terms on school uniform.</p> <p>NAS purchased essential logo items and provided a supermarket voucher for non logo clothing.</p> <p>The option for support with uniform has been recently promoted with schools and district councils at an operational level leading to a recent increase in uniform specific applications.</p> <p>Parents on a low income with a number of school age children have been approached directly offering uniform (and other) support from NAS</p> <p>Due to the pandemic and subsequent further hardship NAS now in talks with the head teachers association to look at a more strategic and school based consistent provision for the future.</p>
7.9	<p>Question from Cllr Chrissie Rumsby Has the leader informed the charity Centre for Mental Health that Norfolk has deleted Member Champion for Mental Health and therefore no longer a signatory to the Local Authority Mental Health Challenge?</p> <p>Response from the Leader and Cabinet Member for Governance and Strategy The responsibilities and oversight of the previous role will now be incorporated in to</p>

	<p>two, more focussed roles therefore I did not contact the Centre for Mental Health. Also we will now move to having two Champion roles incorporating the responsibility for this area, rather than one so, those distinct cohorts of Children and Adults will have greater support. Mental Health is a high priority for the Cabinet so the relevant Portfolio holders will be working closely with the Member Champions to drive that work forward.</p>
7.10	<p>Question from Cllr Emma Corlett What impact will the £20 cut per week to universal credit have across Norfolk?</p> <p>Response from the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care, Public Health and Prevention Thank you for your question. The Council is aware of the removal of the temporary covid related increase in Universal Credit and will monitor the impact this has for people across Norfolk. Through its Norfolk Assistance Scheme and working alongside partner organisations, we will continue to support those most financially vulnerable individuals.</p> <p>Supplementary question from Cllr Emma Corlett Will the local assistance scheme be sufficient to help those who this pushes into inability to meet housing, utilities and food costs?</p> <p>Response from the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care, Public Health and Prevention Thank you for your question. Norfolk's local assistance team continues to support some of the most financially vulnerable people across the County. The scheme is designed to be agile and respond to new needs and pressures as they arise and will work closely with partner organisations to direct help and support to those facing financial hardship.</p>
7.11	<p>Question from Cllr Ben Price The Mental Health Champion was a role that allowed focused support for mental health service users, carers and bereaved families, as well as working to reduce inequalities in access to mental health care. Can the leader give a detailed explanation of how the impact on residents of deleting this post was assessed, what consultations were had with stakeholders, and how the council will ensure that service delivery is not impacted?"</p> <p>Response from the Leader and Cabinet Member for Governance and Strategy In refreshing these roles it was never our intention to reduce any focus on mental health- but rather to integrate it into posts that support different cohorts such as Younger and Older People Champions, as opposed to having a generic role. Mental health remains a high priority to this council and I am proud of the work we do to support our residents, especially during and after the impact of the pandemic</p> <p>These roles are under constant review and will have a much closer working relationship with departments and Cabinet Members than they have previously, so there will be an increased oversight of Mental Health as opposed to the previous arrangement where there was no performance reporting.</p> <p>Supplementary question from Cllr Ben Price With the Mental Health Champion role deleted, how will the council now ensure that</p>

mental health is embedded and supported across all service areas, set objectives, and review progress?”

Response from the Leader and Cabinet Member for Governance and Strategy

With Mental Health imbedded in specific cohort Champion roles there will be a close working relationship with the Portfolio holder to ensure that Mental Health remains an area of high focus for the Council- especially following the pandemic. These post holders will meet regularly with Officers and Cabinet Members and will report any issues directly back to Cabinet for action. It will also be their task to continue to raise the profile of mental Health for Children and Adults internally and externally.