



Council

Members of the council are hereby summoned to attend the meeting of the council to be held in the council chamber, City Hall, Norwich, on

Tuesday, 26 September 2023

19:30

Agenda

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1 Lord Mayor's Announcements

To receive announcements from the Lord Mayor

2 Declarations of interest

(Please note that it is the responsibility of individual members to declare an interest prior to the item if they arrive late for the meeting)

3 Public questions/petitions

To receive questions / petitions from the public which have been submitted in accordance with the council's constitution.

4 Minutes

5 - 38

To agree the accuracy of the minutes of the meeting held on 20 June 2023

5 Questions to Cabinet Members

(A copy of the questions and replies will be available on the council's website prior to the meeting)

6 Update to the Capital Programme 39 - 46

Purpose - This report seeks approval for changes to the council's Capital Programme (2023/2028).

7 Annual Report of the Audit Committee 2022-23 47 - 62

Purpose - This report presents the Annual Report of the Audit Committee 2022/2023, appended to this report at Appendix A, to Council.

8 Annual Report of the Scrutiny Committee 2022-23 63 - 80

Purpose - For council to receive the Annual Report of the Scrutiny Committee 2022-23.

9 Motions

To consider motions for which notice has been given in accordance with the council's constitution

9A Motion - Norwich Bus Fares 81 - 82

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9C Motion - Motion for the Ocean 85 - 88

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9E Motion - Addressing the Issue of 'Box Shifting' for Fair and Effective Business Rates Collection 91 - 92



Leah Mickleborough

Head of Legal and Procurement (Monitoring Officer)

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Council

19:30 to 22:45

20 June 2023

Present: Councillors Wright (Lord Mayor), Ackroyd, Calvert, Carrington, Catt, Champion, Driver, Fox, Francis, Fulton-McAlister, Galvin, Giles, Hampton, Hoechner, Huntley, Jones, Kendrick, Kidman, Lubbock, Maguire, Oliver, Osborn, Packer, Padda, Peek, Prinsley, Sands (M), Sands (S), Schmierer, Stonard, Thomas (Va), Thomas (Vi), and Worley

Apologies: Councillors Davis, Everett, Stutely and Young.

1. Lord Mayor's Announcements

The Lord Mayor announced that he had attended several arts events, including a thought-provoking piece commissioned by The Hospital Rooms, an arts and mental health charity.

He had also attended the launch of Norwich Refugee Week and encouraged members to attend as many events as they were able to.

Finally, he had visited Rouen, one of Norwich's twinned cities, to sign a memorandum of understanding between the two cities which would strengthen the strong relationship already in place.

Members held a minute's silence in remembrance of Sarah Grenville, a former city councillor.

2. Declarations of interests

Councillor Vaughan Thomas and Councillor Fulton-McAlister declared an other interest in item 8(d) as directors of Norwich City Services Ltd.

Councillor Stonard declared an other interest in item 8(d) as an outgoing director of Lion Homes (Norwich) Ltd.

Councillor Galvin declared an other interest in item 8(f) as a private landlord.

3. Public questions/petitions

The Lord Mayor announced that three public questions had been received.

Public question 1

Nick O'Brien asked the leader of the council the following question:

“Next month the annual Norwich Pride event will take place in the city and be enjoyed by thousands of people. This will take place against a national and international political agenda of increasing hostility towards LGBT+ rights which cause alarm to all decent citizens of this city. Given the change of leadership in this city council, can the new leader reaffirm his support for Norwich Pride, on behalf of the city council, and comment on whether he will give his personal support to those working to protect and enhance our city's reputation as being one that always welcomes and celebrates diversity and equality?”

Councillor Stonard, the leader and cabinet member for inclusive and sustainable development gave the following response:

“As a former chair of Norwich Pride, and as someone who has held voluntary leadership positions in the LGBT+ communities in Norfolk and Suffolk for almost 40 years, it's very easy for me to confirm my support for it and I am looking forward to taking part in this year's event on 29 July, not least as it will be the first year that the council itself will be represented through its own group taking part in the March. The council supports the annual event in a wide range of ways, by enabling road closures, providing safety advice and event logistic support, staffing and opening up City Hall as an Event Control Centre, allowing access to the balcony to start the march, flying the Pride flag and lighting City Hall in Pride colours. We also reduce the hire fees for the use of Chapelfield Gardens and Chantry Car Park. We are proud of our LGBT+ community and celebrate with them.

However, this is a challenging time for the LGBT+ community, not least because of the increasing hostility towards Trans people. Last year we passed a motion in this chamber, affirming the city council's belief that trans rights are human rights and affirming the legal rights of all protected groups under the 2010 Equality Act. This council believes all council services must be equipped to welcome and provide appropriate service and good customer care to suit transgender and non-binary people.

I would also like to take this opportunity restate the policy of Norwich Labour Party – relevant because this is a Labour-controlled council – which was passed a full seven years ago, in support of Trans rights. This policy states that Norwich Labour party stands united against discrimination of any kind and aims to create a just society. It believes that Trans men are men and Trans women are women and non-binary people are non-binary, and it further states that we stand opposed to transphobic discrimination. Trans rights are Human Rights. We stand with our trans friends and against transphobia of all kinds. As I say, this has been Norwich Labour Party policy since 2016 and we remain 100% committed to it.

I am proud that Norwich has a long history of being a radical, innovative city; rich in cultural and ethnic diversity which I, and the council, both celebrate and promote. I want the city to be a fair, welcoming, safe, accessible and inclusive

place for everyone. As a council, we work closely with partners and communities as part of our continued commitment to tackling inequality and promoting diversity to make Norwich the best it can be for everyone, recognising that different people and communities have different needs, so it's a city where everyone feels they belong, is respected, has a voice, and has the chance to succeed and thrive.

And, finally, if it's not too soon, may I wish everyone a happy pride."

By way of a supplementary question, Nick O'Brien said that Norwich had always been a welcoming city with progressive roots and asked what the priority was of the cabinet in terms of inclusion. Councillor Stonard replied that there were still areas where there was a need for greater support in the current political climate and these were the Trans community and asylum seekers and refugees.

Public question 2

Jane Overhill asked the leader of the council and cabinet member for inclusive and sustainable development the following question:

"Living in Thorpe Hamlet, the presence and work of the SOS bus to ensure those who run into difficulties, while enjoying the Norwich late night economy, return safely to their homes has been acknowledged for many years. News that this service could be cut due to pressures on NHS budgets, has worried residents who live near Prince of Wales Road who have, if they encounter a person in distress, been able to assist and direct them to the SOS bus service. Can the Leader comment on whether this council will support the campaign to save this important service and advocate for its continuation?"

Councillor Stonard, the leader of the council and cabinet member for inclusive and sustainable development gave the following response:

"The SOS bus in Norwich city centre has for 20 years been a vital source of assistance for people using the night time economy at weekends. We have come to take for granted the excellent work it does, made all the more remarkable by the fact that most of those working on the bus are volunteers.

For those who aren't familiar with the work of the SOS bus, their own website states that the service provides assistance to anyone in Norwich city centre on Friday and Saturday nights whose wellbeing is threatened by illness or injury, emotional distress or other vulnerability.

When large groups of people congregate there will always be people who get separated from their friends, lose their wallet or purse, have no charge in their phone, miss their bus or train home, or become injured in some way, all of which makes them incredibly vulnerable. The SOS bus is a safe haven for people in such vulnerable circumstances, in the middle of the night and often a long way from home. The volunteers are supported by a paramedic and a first aider. I went to see it some years ago when I was the portfolio holder and was very impressed by the quality of the service and the dedication and commitment of the staff and volunteers.

In case anyone doubts the need or importance of the service, I would remind them of the circumstances that led to it being set up. There were in the 1990's several deaths of young people in and around the nighttime economy. The one I remember most clearly, and this is my recollection, was a young man aged about eighteen who had been out with his friends celebrating the end of their exams. This young man was refused entry to a night club because, as I recall, he wasn't wearing the right shoes. Unfortunately, his group had already gone into the club and so none of them knew what had happened or where he was. He was left alone and vulnerable in Norwich in the small hours, separated from his friends and with time to waste. I don't know exactly what happened next, but it seems he walked down to the river where he was found drowned some hours later. Following this tragedy, Norwich realised that something had to be done, to protect young people like him, and the SOS bus was born. It was unique in this country at the time and has since been copied by other towns and cities.

The bus also provides the benefit for the NHS of helping prevent unnecessary A&E visits and ambulance call outs, both of which are expensive and add pressure to already-stretched health services and frees up police officers time.

It is part-funded by Norfolk County Council public health and the Norfolk and Waveney Integrated Care Board. The NHS is considering ending its funding in March. Recently, the local NHS also considered closing our much-loved walk-in centre. We all know that the NHS is under enormous financial pressure following fourteen years of Tory austerity and then having to respond to a global pandemic when it was already struggling from a lack of funds and staff shortages. My concern is that this wanton neglect of our superb NHS by the heartless Tories is the real reason why much-loved and moreover vital local services which we all take for granted are being considered for closure. It's all about money but in reality, both these services actually save the NHS money. Overwhelming public and political pressure saved our walk-in centre and the same must happen with the SOS bus. Therefore, I am very pleased to confirm that this council will support the campaign to save the SOS bus and will advocate for its continuation."

There was no supplementary question.

Public question 3

Jason Bill asked the cabinet member for resources the following question:

"How does the council ensure probity in procurement by council officers?"

Councillor Kendrick, the cabinet member for resources gave the following response:

"Thank you, Mr Bill. As I understand you have been made aware, the council's constitution includes our procurement rules, the purpose of which is not just to obtain value for money but as they state "to ensure probity, transparency and equality" when we are buying goods and services. These rules must be followed when the council undertakes its purchasing activity. They set out, for example, that there must be segregation of duties within purchasing

processes to minimise the risk of error and fraud and other inappropriate activity.

All council staff are bound by a code of conduct, as are all councillors, which require them to declare such conflicts and take appropriate action to manage the risk of conflict. If you want to know further details, there is extensive information on the procurement section of our website you are very welcome to review.”

By way of a supplementary question, Mr Bill commented that several years ago, he had met with a council officer and asked what he could do to tender to create social housing for the council. A few weeks later, he was defamed by that officer and successfully sued the council. Recently, he had submitted a tender to the council and the officer that had previously defamed him had taken part in the consideration of the award of that tender. He asked if the council procedure adhered to the standards of the Nolan principles if the council failed to declare that it had acted unlawfully against him.

Councillor Kendrick responded that this was not a suitable forum for the question and Mr Bill was welcome to contact the Council’s Monitoring Officer regarding the matter.

4. Minutes

RESOLVED to approve the accuracy of the minutes of the meetings held on 14 March 2023, 28 April 2023, and 23 May 2023.

5. Questions to Cabinet Members

(Full details of the questions and responses were available on the council’s website prior to the meeting. A revised version is attached to these minutes at Appendix A and includes a minute of any supplementary questions and responses.)

The Lord Mayor announced that 22 questions had been received from members of the council to cabinet members, for which notice had been given in accordance with the provisions of the council’s constitution.

The questions are summarised as follows:

- Question 1 Councillor Maguire to the leader of the council and cabinet member for inclusive and sustainable development on the Non-domestic Rating Bill
- Question 2 Councillor Mike Sands to the cabinet member for resources on Voter ID
- Question 3 Councillor Packer to the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety on the leasehold system.
- Question 4 Councillor Sue Sands to the leader of the council on local government funding

- Question 5 Councillor Fulton-McAlister to deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety on the Renters Reform Bill
- Question 6 Councillor Kidman to the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety on the Safer Neighbourhoods Initiative
- Question 7 Councillor Huntley to deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety on the Mile Cross depot site
- Question 8 Councillor Prinsley to the cabinet member for wellbeing and culture on accessible toilets
- Question 9 Councillor Padda to the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety on the decoration allowance scheme
- Question 10 Councillor Driver to the cabinet member for communities and social inclusion on tennis facilities
- Question 11 Councillor Peek to the leader of the council and cabinet member for inclusive and sustainable development on compulsory purchase orders
- Question 12 Councillor Lubbock to the cabinet member for communities and social inclusion on Eaton Park parking charges
- Question 13 Councillor Osborn to the cabinet member for communities and social inclusion on City College strikes
- Question 14 Councillor Price to the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety on telephone wait times
- Question 15 Councillor Champion to the cabinet member for communities and social inclusion on veteran trees in Chapelfield Gardens
- Question 16 Councillor Galvin to the cabinet member for resources on interim staff
- Question 17 Councillor Hoechner to the leader of the council and cabinet member for inclusive and sustainable development on an update to the advertising motion
- Question 18 Councillor Fox to the leader of the council and cabinet member for inclusive and sustainable development on public access to City Hall
- Question 19 Councillor Haynes to the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety on repairs at St Leonards Road
- Question 20 Councillor Calvert to the cabinet member for climate change on an insulation scheme
- Question 21 Councillor Francis to the leader of the council and the cabinet member for inclusive and sustainable development on bins on pavements

Question 22 Councillor Schmierer to the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety on loneliness metrics

6. Gambling statement of principles (Gambling Policy)

Councillor Jones moved and Councillor Huntley seconded the recommendations as set out in the report.

Following debate, it was:

RESOLVED, unanimously to approve the Gambling Statement of Principles (Gambling Policy).

7. Appointments of representatives to outside bodies 2023-24

(An updated appendix to the report was circulated prior to the meeting.)

Councillor Kendrick moved and Councillor Driver seconded the recommendations as set out in the report.

Following debate, it was:

RESOLVED, with a majority voting in favour, to:

- (1) Make appointments to non-executive outside bodies for 2023-24 as set out in appendix A to this report,
- (2) Note that Councillor Schmierer is appointed to the vacancy on the Norwich Preservation Trust Ltd; and
- (3) Delegate to the head of legal and procurement, in consultation with the leaders of the political groups to make any changes to the appointments arising during the year.

8. Motions

(Councillor Stonard indicated that he wished to withdraw item 8(g) Motion on Norwich Bus Fares and this was noted.)

Motion 8(a) – Rights of the River Wensum

Councillor Galvin moved and Councillor Osborn seconded the following motion:

“In April 2022 a celebration of the rights of the river Wensum took place in Wensum Park. Many hundreds of people attended and heard the informal but powerful declaration of its rights.

Our freshwater environments and waterways are facing numerous pressures from pollution, climate change, land management practices, development and amenity use. It is clear that our environmental laws and regulations are failing to prevent the destruction of nature, often simply regulating the rate of destruction. The United Nations has called for the human race to rethink its

relationship with the natural world in order that we might enable the recovery of nature upon which humans and all species are dependant: ('Solutions for a Planet in Crisis' speech from Inger Anderson in January 2021).

At the same time there is an emerging global movement of governments recognising the Rights of Nature and in particular the rights of rivers. Rights of Nature is a way of re-thinking our relationship with nature - from one of dominance to one of interdependency requiring a respectful, holistic and empathic approach.

It can also act as a catalyst to shift our thinking from an extractive economy towards a regenerative economy. The idea of nature having rights is not new. Nature has rights. What is new is how we can intervene using a rights of nature lens to protect nature and to give the river a voice as a single entity, from source to sea. We have extended rights to corporations globally – a company which is a wholly fictional entity has gained legal rights and is recognised as a legal entity distinct from its individual decision makers.

If we can define a corporation as having the rights of personhood, then we can imagine a River having these personhood rights?

The Universal Declaration of River Rights establishes that all rivers shall possess, at minimum, the following fundamental rights: (1) The right to flow, (2) The right perform essential functions within the river's ecosystem, (3) The right to be free from pollution, (4) The right to feed and be fed by sustainable aquifers, (5) The right to native biodiversity, and (6) The right to regeneration and restoration.

This approach is supported by many local wildlife bodies. It offers an enormous opportunity to help develop a River Wensum Charter over the next 2 years which establishes the rights listed above.

Council **RESOLVES:**

- 1) to acknowledge the growing global movement of 'rights of nature' as a framework for rethinking its relationship with the environment.
- 2) that there is a case to be made for considering our interactions with our local waterways in the context of 'Rights of Rivers' and through which the health and wellbeing of the River Wensum can be addressed.
- 3) to explore with local communities and relevant stakeholders the implementation of Rights of Rivers along the River Wensum. This will involve working towards the production of a 'Declaration on the Rights of the River Wensum' by relevant stakeholders for possible endorsement by the council within 2 years."

Following debate, it was:

RESOLVED, with a majority voting against, to reject the motion.

Motion 8(b) – Local traffic schemes

Councillor Stonard moved, and Councillor Hampton seconded the motion as set out on the agenda.

Following debate, it was:

RESOLVED, unanimously that:

“Council welcomes the proposals from Norfolk County Labour councillors to devolve local traffic schemes and road maintenance to joint bodies consisting of district and county councillors. Council believes this will give our communities a greater say, enable this council to involve more local people and integrate local traffic schemes into other local initiatives and neighbourhood plans.

Council **RESOLVES**:

To engage with the county council to discuss the best way of setting up a joint body, governance and budgeting arrangements and all associated matters with a view to including considering any financial consequences as part of our 2024 budget and starting such joint arrangements from April 2024 or soon thereafter as possible.”

(As two hours had passed since the beginning of the meeting, the Lord Mayor asked if the remaining items could be taken as unopposed business. Councillor Sue Sands opposed item 8(c). Items 8(d) and 8(e) had unaccepted amendments so these would be debated. Subsequently, during debate, the proposer of motion 8(e), Councillor Schmierer, withdrew his opposition to the amendments and this was taken as unopposed business).

Motion 8(c) – Sewage discharges in rivers and coastal waters

Councillor Mike Sands moved, and Councillor Hampton seconded the motion as set out on the agenda.

Following debate, it was:

RESOLVED, unanimously that:

“Council believes sewage discharges in rivers and coastal waters is unacceptable. There is a direct and indirect adverse impact on water quality, the environment, human health, amenity, and businesses. It also damages the reputation of our beautiful city and county. Council regrets the lack of urgency and meaningful sanctions for sewage discharges and recognises increased development in Norwich and Norfolk will add to the problem in future unless action is taken at source.

Council **RESOLVES** to:

- (1) Welcome the government’s intention to consult on the introduction of Schedule 3 of the Flood and Water management Act 2010 and urges

government to expedite the process. Council believes water companies should be held automatically liable for any sewage discharge. In addition to fines levied upon them, water companies should automatically be liable for compensation for direct and indirect impacts on those, particularly businesses, near to or affected by the discharge assessed by an independent body funded by water companies but not appointed by or accountable to them.

- (2) Support all options to bring water companies back into public, municipal or co-operative ownership whereby profits can be put towards much needed infrastructural improvements rather than going to shareholders as dividend payments, and to ensure greater adherence to regulation as well as opportunity to enhance environmental protection.”

Motion 8(d) – Protection and recovery of the swift population

The Lord Mayor said that the following amendment had been received from Councillor Giles:

“Replacing the words “Norwich Regeneration Limited” with the words “Lion Homes” in resolution 1), and,

Inserting the words “in conjunction with the priorities of the Environmental and Biodiversity Action Plan” at the end of resolution 6).”

Councillor Champion indicated that he was willing to accept the amendment and as no other member objected, it became part of the substantive motion.

Councillor Champion moved and Councillor Fox seconded the motion as amended.

The Lord Mayor said that notice had been received of a further amendment to the motion from Councillor Giles which had been circulated:

“Replacing the word “require” with the word “request” in resolution 1)

Replacing the word “include” with the words “to consider including, where practicable and in conjunction with the agreed priorities of its business plan and model” in resolution 1)

Replace resolution 3) with the following “Commit to reviewing the findings of the Biodiversity Baseline and Opportunities Study to ascertain the species and habitats under threat in Norwich, and how we go about conserving and enhancing them most effectively in accordance with our Biodiversity Strategy and Development Plan. This will include considering updating planning policies to include a requirement for swift bricks to be used in all new buildings.”

Councillor Champion indicated that he was not willing to accept these amendments, and these were debated in the usual way.

On being put to the vote, with a majority voting in favour, the amendment was passed and became part of the substantive motion.

The Lord Mayor said that he had received a request to take the vote in part on the motion.

Discussion ensued.

On being moved to the vote, members voted on the resolutions as set out in the motion as amended 1), 3, 5) and 6) and then resolutions 2) and 4) together, and it was:

RESOLVED,

- (1) unanimously to agree the following resolutions, which became part of the substantive motion:
 - 1) request its wholly-owned company, Lion Homes Ltd, to consider including, where practicable and in conjunction with the agreed priorities of its business plan and model, swift bricks or swift boxes as standard on all its new properties, and to, where practicable;
 - 3) commit to reviewing the findings of the Biodiversity Baseline and Opportunities Study to ascertain the species and habitats under threat in Norwich, and how we go about conserving and enhancing them most effectively in accordance with our Biodiversity Strategy and Development Plan. This will include considering updating planning policies to include a requirement for swift bricks to be used in all new buildings.
 - 5) use Citizen magazine and the council's social media accounts to raise awareness about swifts, inform residents how to install their own swift boxes, and publicise other appropriate actions members of the public can take; and,
 - 6) work with the Norwich Historic Churches Trust and the caretakers of other tall buildings in the city to find appropriate ways church towers and other high places can be used to support swift colonies in conjunction with the priorities of the Environmental and Biodiversity Action Plan.
- (2) with a majority voting against, to reject the following resolutions, which were removed from the substantive motion:
 - 2) require Norwich City Services Limited to install swift boxes onto current council-owned properties when roof repairs or similar at-height works are carried out;
 - 4) as part of the Love Norwich scheme, arrange for the council's at-height working equipment and staff trained in the use of it to be available to help put swift boxes onto private properties at intervals through the year;
- (3) therefore the substantive motion is:

RESOLVED unanimously that:

“Swift populations are rapidly declining across the UK. Between 1995 and 2016, numbers of the birds declined by 53%, with first-year survival of the fledgling birds being similarly in decline. In 2021, they were added to the Red list on the UK Conservation Status report.

A simple action that can be taken to support swift populations is the addition of swift boxes or swift bricks across urban areas, providing homes for the birds when they arrive back in the UK in the spring to nest. Without homes they can return to each year, swifts will not nest, as they return each year to the same locations.

Local projects such as Wild King Street and the Norwich Swift Network have been working to make sure that homes exist for returning swifts; multiple swift boxes have gone up on sites across the city. Norwich City Council owns residential and commercial property across Norwich that would be suitable for aiding in this endeavour, and with local planning policies, can influence the provision of swift homes on many more buildings in our city.

Council **RESOLVES** to:

- 1) request its wholly-owned company, Lion Homes Ltd, to consider including, where practicable and in conjunction with the agreed priorities of its business plan and model, swift bricks or swift boxes as standard on all its new properties, and to, where practicable;
- 2) commit to reviewing the findings of the Biodiversity Baseline and Opportunities Study to ascertain the species and habitats under threat in Norwich, and how we go about conserving and enhancing them most effectively in accordance with our Biodiversity Strategy and Development Plan. This will include considering updating planning policies to include a requirement for swift bricks to be used in all new buildings.
- 3) use Citizen magazine and the council’s social media accounts to raise awareness about swifts, inform residents how to install their own swift boxes, and publicise other appropriate actions members of the public can take; and,
- 4) work with the Norwich Historic Churches Trust and the caretakers of other tall buildings in the city to find appropriate ways church towers and other high places can be used to support swift colonies in conjunction with the priorities of the Environmental and Biodiversity Action Plan.

Motion 8(e) – Worker representation on boards

During debate, Councillor Schmierer indicated that he was willing to accept the following amendment from Councillor Stonard:

“Replacing the words “restructure the NCSL Board of Directors to include direct worker representation on the board” with the words “as part of its review of the governance of its wholly owned companies, as recommended by the

recent Peer Review, to consider whether there should be direct worker representation on the Board.”

(This item was therefore taken as unopposed business.)

RESOLVED that:

“Worker representation on boards has a long tradition in many European countries. A number of studies have highlighted beneficial outcomes for both companies and workers associated with worker representation on boards. These benefits include increased firm market value and capital formation, more effective governance due to the valuable operational knowledge workers hold, higher engagement and motivation of workers and more career opportunities. It is rightfully argued that *‘Employees are key stakeholders whose contribution is necessary for the success of innovative enterprises’* and that *‘Workforce relationships are central to company success, and worker board representation would help boards to manage these key stakeholder relationships more effectively.’*”

Council notes that:

- 1) as part of the recent LGA Corporate Peer Challenge peers have recommended a further review of the governance arrangements in line with best practice.
- 2) The council has committed to addressing peer recommendations in the coming months.

Council **RESOLVES** to ask cabinet to as part of its review of the governance of its wholly owned companies, as recommended by the recent peer review, to consider whether there should be direct worker representation on the Board.”

Motion 8(f) – National Housing Crisis

It was noted that Councillor Beth Jones had made the following amendment to her own motion, and therefore it would become part of the substantive motion without further debate:

“Inserting the words “and to write to ask all Leaders of all Parliamentary groups to commit, if called upon to form a government,” after the words “this Council RESOLVES to call upon Government.”

(This item, as amended, was taken as unopposed business).

RESOLVED that:

“The worst cost of living crisis since the 1950s is coinciding with a national housing crisis. The result of this will be an increasing number of our residents deprived of one of the most fundamental pillars to a healthy and happy life – a secure, stable, and affordable home.

Homeownership is in decline following a period of rising house prices that has made buying a home unaffordable for too many. This combined with a drastic depletion in social housing stock has forced an increasing number of Norwich residents into the private rented sector and at the mercy of rising rents and under-regulated tenancies. Worse still, many are left without a permanent residence at all, as levels of homelessness remain high.

Whilst this council has welcomed the Norwich Council Housing Strategy 2020-26 it is now calling for the acceleration of its delivery to increase the provision of affordable, secure, high-quality, and energy-efficient housing across the city to tackle the root of the housing crisis locally.

However, in the face of a worsening national economic crisis, urgent action is needed to protect our residents, especially those in the most precarious living circumstances, from its severest impacts.

To support residents through the immediate and acute period of the cost-of-living crisis this council **RESOLVES** to call upon government and to write to ask all Leaders of all Parliamentary groups to commit, if called upon to form a government, to:

- 1) Increase Local Housing Allowance rates in line with rising private market rents - making these more affordable and reducing the proportion of income spent on rent at a time when household budgets are increasingly squeezed.
- 2) Introduce rent reforms and delegate powers to local authorities to set rent caps to protect private tenants from further rental increases or exploitative charges at a time of crisis.
- 3) Legislate a no winter evictions guarantee to protect private tenants from homelessness through the most challenging period of the cost-of-living crisis.
- 4) Abolish the Right to Buy in favour of expanding the provision of high-quality, energy-efficient, and environmentally sustainable social housing stock providing homes for residents and their families.
- 5) Expand pathways to homeownership so that owning a home can still be a realistic aspiration for any residents.
- 6) Prioritise the passing of the Renters' Reform Bill that seeks to improve standards and regulations across the private rented sector to better protect tenants."

Motion 8(g) – Norwich Bus Fares

(Councillor Stonard, the mover of the motion, had withdrawn this motion earlier in the meeting.)

The meeting was closed.

LORD MAYOR

Appendix A

Council

20 June 2023

Questions to cabinet members

Question 1

Councillor Maguire to ask the leader of the council and cabinet member for inclusive and sustainable development the following question:

“Last month the previous portfolio holder for sustainable growth, now the new Leader, commented on the resilience of the Norwich high street and the resilience of the retail offer this city can still offer. Given the critical importance of small and medium enterprises to the local economy and retail in general, will he share my concerns that the Non-Domestic Rating Bill will do little, and indeed possibly hinder, protecting our city shops from increasing business rates at a time when the economy is still particularly vulnerable?”

Councillor Stonard, the leader and cabinet member for inclusive and sustainable development’s response:

“Currently businesses can have a number of reductions in their Business Rates, notably:

- Retail, Hospitality and Leisure premises have been awarded a 75% reduction in their Business Rates for the 23/24 financial year, capped at Rateable Values up to £110,000.
- Small Business Rate Relief if a property’s rateable value is less than £15,000 and the business only uses one property. A business will not pay rates on a property with a rateable value of £12,000 or less, if that’s the only property the business uses. For properties with a rateable value of £12,001 to £15,000, the rate of relief will go down gradually from 100% to 0%.
- In April 2023 rateable hereditaments were subject to a revaluation. Where there is a large increase in the rateable value the rates payable are subject to Transitional Relief.
- Some properties may be eligible for Supporting Small Business Relief which restricts their increase to £600 this financial year.
- Properties with a Rateable Value of less than £51,000 pay the small business multiplier.
- Some businesses are exempt from rates completely. Others may be eligible for charitable or discretionary rate relief and more details of reliefs available can be found on our website.

The Non-Domestic Rating Bill is currently at its second reading in the House of Lords and is a government bill that would make changes to business rates. The Bill will support businesses by modernising the business rates system to incentivise property improvements and support more frequent revaluations. It would reduce the time between property revaluations (proposed from 5 years to 3 years, meaning those with falling values will see their bills drop sooner).

The Bill will impose a duty on businesses to notify the Valuation Office Agency of changes that could affect a property's rateable value.

It will also provide new business rates improvement relief, so businesses making qualifying building improvements will not face higher business rates bills for 12 months. This will make it easier for businesses to invest with new reliefs for property improvements, providing tax breaks for businesses who are extending or upgrading their property.

The aim of the measures being put forward is to review and reform business rates in England, making them fairer and more responsive to changes in the market."

(By way of a supplementary question, Councillor Maguire asked if the leader of the council agreed that there was a need to radically transform business rates and how this should be done. Councillor Stonard replied that he agreed and there was a need for central government to be willing to make the changes.)

Question 2

Councillor Mike Sands to ask the cabinet for resources the following question:

"Last month the introduction of Voter ID in Norwich, a measure which Conservative MP Jacob Rees-Mogg, who was in government when the measure was introduced, recently admitted as being an attempt at gerrymander the rules to gain electoral advantage, saw 68 Norwich citizens refused their right to vote.

Voters without an accepted form of ID - estimated at around 2 million - were able to apply for a free certificate allowing them to vote but only 85,000 people - around 4% of the estimate - applied for one online ahead of May's polls. The Electoral Commission studies into the impact of Voter ID confirmed that unemployed people, council housing tenants, and those with lower educational qualifications were more severely affected by the changes. Can the cabinet member for resources comment on this and advise council on what steps this council will take to make voting easier for those without ID?"

Councillor Kendrick, the cabinet member for resources' response:

"We are of course aware that Voter ID was brought in by the government alongside a highly publicised campaign by the Electoral Commission. Despite their campaign and the additional extensive communication plan put in place by the council, it was disappointing to see that some residents were not able to vote because they did not have an acceptable form of photo ID. The autumn canvass is coming up and I know that we will be communicating the need for photo ID at a polling station with every property in Norwich. This will

include information about the free Voter Authority Certificate. The communication and outreach work which started before the elections last May is still ongoing, so we will continue ensure that we are reaching as many residents as possible. I am pleased to see that the scrutiny committee intends to look at the impact of voter ID at their meeting in July and I will very much look forward to attending to understanding their thoughts on what can be done to ensure no-one in Norwich is disenfranchised.”

(In response to Councillor Sand’s supplementary question, Councillor Kendrick gave assurance that he would carefully consider recommendations from the scrutiny committee’s July meeting.)

Question 3

Councillor Packer to ask deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety the following question:

“Representing a ward with many leaseholders, I was concerned that plans to abolish the ‘feudal’ leasehold system in England and Wales were dropped last month by this Tory government. After announcing that leasehold would be previously abolished, many leaseholders cancelled their plans to undertake statutory lease extension and the U-turn has placed many now in limbo. As a Labour and Co-operative councillor, I have long supported and campaigned for leasehold reform and believe we need to strengthen and promote ‘commonhold’ alongside co-operative housing tenure, to protect homeowners and renters from unreasonable costs. Commonhold, widely used internationally and which has been available in the UK for nearly two decades, would be a better system to give people a say over their homes. Can the cabinet member for housing and community safety comment on whether she would support this?”

Councillor Jones, the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety’s response:

“Until detailed legislation comes forward setting out the nature of a “commonhold lease” and a plan to move from existing tenures to the new tenure type it would not be appropriate to commit the council. That being said there is a clear need to simplify and standardise all tenure types and we would engage and support that process.”

(In response to a supplementary question, Councillor Jones said that she was very interested in the proposals around commonholds and all options should be ‘on the table’ and fully explored.)

Question 4

Councillor Sue Sands to ask the leader of the council and cabinet member for inclusive and sustainable development the following question:

“Representing a ward which contains some of the highest level of poverty in the city and the greatest need for strong public services to respond to it, I was

concerned by research from the Special Interest Group of Municipal Authorities (SIGOMA) that revealed between 2010/11 and 2023/24, the 10% of local authorities with the highest levels of deprivation faced funding cuts averaging 28.3% - while the 10% of councils with the lowest levels of deprivation faced funding cuts averaging 10.1%. Councillor Sir Steve Houghton, leader of Barnsley Council and chair of SIGOMA, warns that the "gap between the rich and the poor is getting wider", while the Government has reneged on a promise to reallocate business rates. Would the Leader agree with Councillor Houghton and commit to making the case, at every opportunity, for this council to receive the funding needed to meet the challenges this city faces?"

Councillor Stonard, the leader and cabinet member for inclusive and sustainable development's response:

"It is quite clear that the Tories have manipulated the local government funding formulae and processes to benefit more affluent areas at the expense of the poorest areas as the statistics you have quoted demonstrate. This has meant that the authorities facing the greatest economic and social needs have faced the biggest cuts and are struggling the most to meet those needs. In Norwich, we have faced particular challenges. The Tories have delivered a real term reduction in funding to this council of over 21% since 2015 alone, and before that year-on-year cuts of more than 8% were seen from the start of the Tory led coalition in 2010. While we have managed this relatively well, have made savings and have protected front line services, but there are more cuts to follow over the next few years which will be incredibly challenging for us. This comes on top of the cost of living crisis, which was of course exacerbated by the disastrous Truss budget last Autumn which crashed the economy. Some of our wards in Norwich are very deprived. We know that poverty, low pay and deprivation in general results in a much greater need for economic and social support, but the Tories are more interested in passing money to areas populated by their affluent supporters than in supporting those who are suffering hardship and most in need. Therefore, I do agree with Councillor Sir Steve Houghton and will indeed make the case at every opportunity for this council to receive the funding to meet the challenges this city faces."

(By way of a supplementary question, Councillor Sands asked if the council would commit to working closely with the Local Government Association to make the strongest case possible for Norwich to get the resources it needs. Councillor Stonard replied that a Labour government would empower regions to build strong local economies to support strong communities, with greater powers given to local leaders.)

Question 5

Councillor Fulton-McAlister to ask the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety the following question:

“Representing University Ward which contains a significant, and growing, number of private renters, the issue of poor-quality housing, exorbitant rents and lack of security of tenure are repeatedly raised by my constituents and remain a very real problem. We, as councillors, have debated and discussed this issue many times before. Now that the Renters Reform Bill has finally been published and will proceed through the House of Commons, can the cabinet member for housing and community safety comment on whether she feels this will solve the problems of the private rented sector in this city?”

Councillor Jones, the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety’s response:

“After more than four years of delays and broken promises the Renter Reform Bill has begun its journey through parliament, although it is important to note that it is still a long way from Royal assent and entering law. In this time nearly 65 000 households in the country have been made homeless because of section 21 of the 1998 Housing Act which the government promised this Bill will abolish, but for those households this is too late.

Whilst I welcome any legislation that increases protections for private renters, this bill should be viewed cautiously and as only the beginning of introducing a fairer system for private renters rather than the end point as there are areas where it presently does not go far enough.

It is important to acknowledge some of the protections it will potentially offer:

- A new landlord registry will support tenants being better informed prior to entering a tenancy
- Abolition of section 21, so called “no fault evictions”
- Increased powers for tenants to challenge rent increases

But there are clear loopholes which are very worrying.

- If a landlord evicts with the intent to sell, a ban on reletting for only three months is unlikely to be much of a disincentive to a landlord who evicts for the purposes of increasing rents.
- Lack of adequate safeguards to prevent retaliatory evictions when tenants challenge unsafe conditions.

There is much more to be added to this legislation to ensure that it provides real protections to those living in the private rented sector. I fully support the campaigns by Generation Rent and the Renters Reform Coalition to strengthen this legislation as it passes through parliament, so it provides robust protections in the future.”

(In response to Councillor Fulton-McAlister’s supplementary question, Councillor Jones said that she felt that the Renter’s Reform Bill fell short, especially in relation to section 21 eviction noticed. Norwich City Council was committed to protecting private renters.)

Question 6

Councillor Kidman to ask the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety the following question:

“Community safety remains a top concern for my constituents and despite the cuts to this council I was pleased that our budget in February protected services such as the Safer Neighbourhoods Initiative and expanded CCTV. Given a recent rise in burglary in the city can the cabinet member for housing and community safety comment on the latest batch of alley-gates installed and the locations across the city?”

Councillor Jones, the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety’s response:

“Since January 2023 Norwich City Council’s Safer Neighbourhood Initiative – Community Fund has funded and installed new alley gates at 7 locations across the city in the following wards – Lakenham, Crome, Thorpe Hamlet, Town Close, University and Nelson. These gates are providing additional security and peace of mind for 36 homes. To date the scheme has benefitted a total of 162 homes.”

(Councillor Kidman had no supplementary question.)

Question 7

Councillor Huntley to ask the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety the following question:

“I am proud to represent Mile Cross which has benefitted substantially from the city council’s political agenda of building council homes. Pointer’s Field, Hansard Close, the Kings Arms site, and now the former Mile Cross depot are just a few to mention. Now that work to build on the Mile Cross depot site is well underway, can the cabinet member for housing and community safety comment on progress towards when this important project should be completed and the significant benefits it will bring our community?”

Councillor Jones, the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety’s response:

“Colleagues across the council are working hard to bring forward housing development on the Mile Cross Former Depot Site. Indeed it is pleasing to see that work is proceeding well to deliver the land remediation contract that was approved by cabinet in December 2022.

The land remediation contract is ensuring the site is prepared to allow development to begin. This contract in itself is bringing forward innovation and ensuring much of the material on site is being reused. Through providing certainty of land conditions, it will considerably de risk the build of the final development so should save the council money. The remediation is expected to be completed by October this year and is on track to be delivered with budget.

Whilst the groundworks are underway, work is continuing to design the first phase of designing the housing development. The emerging design proposes 67 new council homes, and it is expected that the planning application will be submitted in July.

The new homes are being designed again to ensure the council leads the way in developing a sense of place, providing residents with a great living environment and cost effective homes to run. Although design details have yet to be confirmed, there is an expectation that there will be a continued commitment to a fabric first efficient approach to build with the introduction of renewable energy generation incorporated within the scheme.

It is planned that the start of the construction contract should be mobilised by the early summer in 2024 with new homes being delivered in late 2025. I look forward to handing the keys over to new residents in due course.”

(By way of a supplementary question, Councillor Huntley asked if the deputy leader could comment on the features of the housing being proposed for the Mile Cros Depot site. Councillor Jones replied that she could not comment on design specifics, but the council had a commitment to high quality housing, building homes for residents.)

Question 8

Councillor Prinsley to ask the cabinet member for wellbeing and culture the following question:

“Supporting constituents with disabilities in my ward is always a priority, particularly given the impact of the oppressive and increasingly severe sanctions regime this current government has instigated. I know that access to public facilities, including the Forum and all it has to offer, is particularly important to my residents and I was therefore particularly pleased that efforts by this Labour led city council to attain new funding for modern, accessible toilet facilities were successful. Can the cabinet member for wellbeing and culture comment on progress to install these new facilities and promote the benefits of them?”

Councillor Oliver, the cabinet member for wellbeing and culture’s response:

“I am delighted to say that the new Changing Places toilet at The Forum opened a couple of weeks ago following the city council securing £65,000 from the government’s Changing Places toilets fund. This facility will help remove the stress, discomfort and indignity that many people with multiple and complex disabilities and their carers experience when trying to use conventional accessible toilets. The Forum is a brilliant place to have one, being so central and containing the Millennium Library. Our communications team has produced a video with The Forum that is being promoted across our four social media channels to maximise awareness of the facility.”

(In response to the supplementary question, Councillor Oliver replied that Changing Places toilets were about inclusion and allowing everyone to access the city. The council had worked closely in partnership with The Forum to secure funding for the Changing Places toilet.)

Question 9

Councillor Padda to ask the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety the following question:

“I was pleased to see that the new contract to assist tenants to decorate their homes was approved by cabinet in March. This will increase the amount payable to each tenant, reflecting the escalating costs due to the cost-of-living crisis. Will the cabinet member comment on this initiative and whether it might be adapted further to meet the needs of residents who begin their tenancy with the city council?”

Councillor Jones, the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety’s response:

“This was agreed as part of the cabinet paper in March for new tenants in mind and had been in place for some time. There was an uplift to account for the increase in the costs of materials and this was factored into the renewal of the contract. We know from the latest May update of new tenant’s satisfaction survey – when asked the following question from those who received a decoration allowance –

“Did you find the system easy to choose and select materials?” – 77% responded yes, 12% had not used it yet, 8% did not use, and only 3% responded no.”

(Councillor Padda did not have a supplementary question.)

Question 10

Councillor Driver to ask the cabinet member for communities and social inclusion the following question:

“Representing a ward which has benefitted from the investment in our parks and particularly tennis court facilities I was pleased to learn that a new partnership with the Lawn Tennis Association (LTA) and the city council will see £222,447 from the government and the LTA Tennis Foundation invested in courts in Harford Park, Alderman Walker Park and Bowthorpe Park. This will substantially improve these areas and make them more accessible for the sport to be played. Can the cabinet member for communities and social inclusion comment on the success of the partnership created with the LTA and the improvements delivered so far to enhancing our tennis facilities across the city?”

Councillor Giles, the cabinet member for communities and social inclusion’s response:

“The council has been working with the LTA since 2011 to provide accessible, sustainable and high quality tennis facilities at the heart of the community. The first project delivered four hard court tennis courts complete with floodlighting in Eaton Park. The LTA funded 50% of the project costs and in 2012 the service contract was awarded to the National Tennis Association

(formerly known as EA Tennis). Comparison with similar facilities throughout the UK has demonstrated use at Eaton Park is two-and-a-half times greater than LTA expectations

In order to meet this level of demand, in 2016 a further three courts were created at Eaton Park, three at Waterloo Park and two at Harford Park.

In 2017, the council identified further expansion opportunities at Lakenham and Heigham Park as the next phase of the Norwich Tennis Expansion programme, and the new courts were opened to the public last year.

The current project to redevelop the courts at Harford, Alderman Walker and Bowthorpe is a further example of the excellent partnership working between the LTA, Norwich Parks Tennis and the council.

Working in partnership with the LTA and the Greater Norwich Growth Board the Council has delivered almost £1m of investment in Norwich Parks Tennis in the past 12 years.”

(In response to Councillor Driver’s supplementary question, Councillor Giles said that he was pleased to highlight that investments in resurfacing of courts at both Eaton and Waterloo parks were being made to ensure that the high standards of the facilities were maintained.)

Question 11

Councillor Peek to ask the leader of the council and cabinet member for inclusive and sustainable development the following question:

“I note with interest that a new planning application has been submitted for the former Earl of Leicester site on Dereham Road, following the work this council took to pursue the opportunity of a compulsory purchase order. Despite this progress on the development would the Leader agree that it would be much easier if government would enable councils like Norwich to buy up land at a fraction of its potential cost if they plan to build on it and do this through compulsory purchase orders at a price that does not reflect the value of potential planning permissions – the so-called “hope value”? Given that land worth £22,520 per hectare as agricultural land can on average be worth £6.2m per hectare with permission –such a proposal would represent a bold shake-up of the planning system and enable us to build the thousands of new council homes this city needs.”

Councillor Stonard, the leader and cabinet member for inclusive and sustainable development’s response:

“Following cabinet’s approval to seek a compulsory purchase order (CPO) on the site of the former Earl of Leicester site there has been some planning progress. This has proven to be common and welcome side effect of the council considering this action. Officers are continuing to monitor this progress of the site and a decision should be made shortly. Should planning be secured, we will seek to ensure that delivery follows shortly after or will continue towards CPO.

As members are aware we were successful in securing £5.5m in our Towns Deal revolving fund to support such schemes. So, we are resourced to purchase the site should it stall.

I'm pleased to say we have recently successfully completed the acquisition of our first site through the fund on Windmill Road. We will now proceed with seeking a developer for the site and ensuring we enter into an agreement for a quick timetable for delivery.

Under the current legislation there is a fundamental principle, within the compulsory purchase compensation guidance, that land is valued at its current market value, based upon its existing use or planning approval, and not at 'hope value' on a theoretical development scheme. However, current legislation is time consuming and expensive for local authorities to use, even in cases where sites have lain idle for some time.

I certainly do agree that revisions to the CPO process to simplify it, speed it up and allow authorities to purchase derelict or other problems sites at a lower cost would be most welcome."

(In response to a supplementary question from Councillor Peek, Councillor Stonard replied that he wanted to rebalance the power between landowners and local communities and in doing so, would have the ability to force the development of some sites.)

Question 12

Councillor Lubbock to ask the cabinet member for communities and social inclusion the following question:

"Since the introduction of parking charges into the Eaton Park there has been displaced parking causing various problems in the area around the park. The council did promise a review to look into the consequences of imposing the charges. Please will the Portfolio Holder give details of the review?"

Councillor Giles, the cabinet member for communities and social inclusion's response:

"The review is ongoing and will be completed shortly.

The project is on target to meet the objectives that were set. Illegal parking within the park was a significant issue prior to introduction of the new charges. This meant that spaces were unavailable to park users during particularly busy times. There is now little illegal parking in the park, which has increased the number of available of spaces to park users. The take of up of season tickets from regular park users has been good.

The project is on target to exceed the financial target set in the budget for 2023/24. This will increase our ability to maintain the park to a high standard and invest in improved facilities.

With regards to displaced parking on surrounding streets, there have been very few complaints received by the council about this. Any complaints received have been investigated and appropriate action taken.

Finally, we continue to liaise with the county council about whether any further action may be required in the streets surrounding the park."

(By way of a supplementary question, Councillor Lubbock commented that there had been problems with parking on the grass verges which was dangerous and that no action had been taken despite raising the issues as a Councillor enquiry. Councillor Giles replied that if Councillor Lubbock forwarded her concerns directly to him, he would be happy to look into these for her.)

Question 13

Councillor Osborn to ask the cabinet member for communities and social inclusion the following question:

“One of the achievements of the city council has been to work to make Norwich a Living Wage City, including through the Living Wage City Action Group of major employers. City College was one of the key institutions in that Action Group.

So it has been very disappointing and shocking that City College is imposing real terms pay cuts on staff that mean that the college is no longer a living wage employer, and this particularly affects Learning Support Assistants who work with disabled students.

As a result, UCU members at City College have been taking strike action as the pay cuts are unsustainable. Does the cabinet member agree that the proposals for below-inflation pay that City College managers have made are unacceptable, and will he join me in publicly supporting the strikers?”

Councillor Giles, the cabinet member for communities and social inclusion’s response:

“The Labour Group supports the UCU’s work to get the Living Wage reinstated at City College. The Labour Party support the right of all workers to strike. However industrial action is always a last resort, and we hope that for staff and students alike, negotiations can avoid further disruption.

We have been meeting with both City College and the UCU. Through the Norwich Real Living Wage Action Group, we will work to facilitate further negotiations, and explore what support City College needs to get them re-accredited.

As is often the case with the Green Party, there is a reluctance to upset their local Green, national Tory voter base by highlighting the role 13 years of Tory Government real-term cuts have played in this. Further education institutions have seen the largest fall in per-pupil funding in any part of the education system. IFS forecasts suggest per-pupil funding in 2024-25 will be 10% down on 13 years ago.

Thus, following further discussions, I propose to write to both Chloe Smith and the relevant minister to call for an improved funding settlement to City College to reflect the vital role it plays in educating and training local residents, and driving sustainable and inclusive economic growth”

(By way of a supplementary question, Councillor Osborn asked whether Councillor Giles supported the strike action by the staff of City College. Councillor Giles replied that he supported the rights of all workers to take strike action. The council had undertaken a lot of work to support businesses in paying the Real Living Wage, including helping small businesses with accreditation fees).

Question 14

Councillor Price to ask the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety the following question:

“On busy days, people who phone the council can wait over an hour on the line, or up to ten minutes before being offered a call back. Does the cabinet member find this acceptable?”

Councillor Jones, the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety’s response:

“To support customer contact, we have implemented a number of positive changes, an example of this is the call back scheme which enables customers to request a call back from our staff without having to wait in a queue. The phone service wait times however can vary according to demand at a particular given time and the phone system is set to offer a call back after intervals from one minute and occasionally up to ten, when demand has been unpredictable and is exceptionally high.

To support this, we are also piloting a new and additional service which provides automation of some of our more straightforward and frequent service requests which allow our advisers to focus on calls that require our support and assistance for example those who don’t have access to online or need specialist support. In addition to this, we are also in the process of recruiting additional staff to support the peak periods where we have become aware that demand has recently increased.

Also, in line with our digital strategy, we are working on a number of new initiatives to meet the needs of a large proportion of our customers whose preference is to access services online and this will also reduce the demand on the phone service. For example, we have recently added an online service that enables customers to arrange for the payment of council tax without the need to call us. With many customers opting to access services online, we are continually improving, reviewing, and developing additional online services to meet our customer’s needs.”

(In response to a supplementary question, Councillor Jones said that she did not believe that digital was the only way to engage and it was important that residents had the ability to raise issues in the format that was most convenient for them. This was a new area to her portfolio and work would be done on this particular issue.)

Question 15

Councillor Champion to ask the cabinet member for communities and social inclusion the following question:

“When the Easter Fair came to Chapelfield Gardens in April, many of the heavy fairground rides were parked on the grass under mature trees. I was particularly concerned about a veteran London Plane where a heavy fairground ride was parked on the grass and the tree roots, and a corner of the ride extended into the lower branches. This is no way for the City Council to treat its trees, let alone a veteran tree. The problem has been reported to the council. While it would be preferable for heavy machinery and vehicles to

be banned from the park, will the cabinet member agree to at least create exclusion areas around the veteran trees in particular?"

Councillor Giles, the cabinet member for communities and social inclusion's response:

"Thank you for raising the issue of the damage that is being caused to trees in the council's parks by poorly parked vehicles during events.

Events in our parks make a significant contribution to the city and its cultural offering and these do require large vehicles to enter our parks. This needs to be balanced with protecting the built and natural environment in our parks, and ensuring that the events are managed sustainably.

An issue has been identified with how certain events have been handled and staff are liaising to ensure that the risk of any long-term damage to our tree stock is minimised. Staff will be working closely with event promoters to ensure that measures are taken to protect the trees in all of our parks during events."

(In response to the supplementary question, Councillor Giles said that he would need to look into the concept of exclusion areas around veteran trees in more detail.)

Question 16

Councillor Galvin to ask the cabinet member for resources the following question:

"The council has at least 10 interim personnel delivering various important roles. Having interim managers is hugely costly. Senior interim positions currently include: head of building safety and compliance; executive director housing and community; head of asset management; chief finance officer; asbestos compliance manager; fire safety manager. This is not about questioning the effectiveness of these roles and the individuals, but the costs go out of the council's revenue budget and as we know there is not enough of this to begin with. Can the cabinet member for resources tell me how we measure that these contracts provide best value to the council?"

Councillor Kendrick, the cabinet member for resources' response:

"Thank you, Councillor Galvin, for giving me the opportunity to talk about the excellent work being undertaken by the interim staff we have in place as a council.

All interim and consultant contracts are subject to our procurement rules. Contracts are made through specialist agencies and assessed against the IR35 rules to make sure that all tax matters are appropriately treated. Each contractor is subject to line management in the same way that permanent members of staff are managed.

It is clear to me that all have made a significant difference to the way that the organisation operates. I want to particularly highlight the work of several of the staff you mention who have been instrumental in supporting our housing compliance work. A recent independent review of that work, the outcomes of which were reported to cabinet last week and the report specifically stated that

“the pace and amount of progress against the action plan is impressive’. It went on to confirm that the interim staff that we have brought in have made a “fundamental contribution” to achieving this progress, as you acknowledged in cabinet last week.

The recent peer review also positively noted that there is a clear knowledge transfer from interim staff to our permanent staff, meaning that we are able to learn from the expertise we are commissioning which is an external view from the team of Peer Reviewers that attended Norwich only some months ago. The peer review also recognised that fundamentally, recruitment has been challenging across local government. Rather than leave gaps in key roles, putting existing staff under pressure, we have brought in specialist expertise to help drive improvement in services. Workforces are changing, and the use of temporary and interim staff to give expertise and capacity to short term enable us to deliver is something we should embrace. Their value lies in the excellent contributions they have made to the running of this authority.”

(By way of a supplementary question, Councillor Galvin commented that a survey had found that only 11% of interims charged less than £500 per day and asked what processes were in place to increase retention to permanent posts. Councillor Kendrick responded that he was disappointed that Councillor Galvin was only looking at costs and not value obtained. As an employer, the use of interims allowed for particular skills to be brought into the organisation to deal with issues which was value for money.)

Question 17

Councillor Hoechner to ask the leader of the council and cabinet member for inclusive and sustainable development the following question:

“In June 2021, this council agreed to take several measures to address the potentially damaging impacts of advertising on people’s health and the environment. This included ‘develop[ing] and enhanc[ing] an advertising strategy for Norwich City Council which recognises the harmful effects that junk food, environmentally polluting products and activities, payday lenders, gambling and alcohol can have on local residents.’ The Council also agreed to ‘review and update’ its planning policy to regulate the installation of advertising hoardings near schools, and to ‘work with partners to phase out [potentially harmful] advertising’ as much as possible across the city. Can the Cabinet member please clarify what steps have been taken over the past two years to ensure the timely implementation of these measures?”

Councillor Stonard, the leader and cabinet member for inclusive and sustainable development’s response:

“Following the motion to council, a review of how we take forward the proposed measures was carried out. The council currently has a single advertising contract relating to the provision of bus shelters which runs to 2026, and the supplier self regulates content in line with the Control of Advertisement Regulations. An advertising policy is being considered alongside looking at options around future advertising opportunities for the

council, including advertising at bus shelters. This is currently progressing through the Future Shape Norwich Program.

The Council has the ability to control the content of advertisements on its own property and/or land in accordance with contracts; however as a local planning authority, we are not able to control the content of advertisements generally. As part of any future review of our Development Management Policies we may be able to introduce a policy which would manage the location of new hoardings i.e. prevent advertisement hoarding within a certain distance of schools or ensure that they do not impact upon heritage assets or highway safety but where new advertisement hoardings are permitted, the content of any advert could not be regulated.

In view of the current position with the emerging Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill and the forthcoming review of the National Planning Policy Framework there is insufficient clarity on what any review of development management policies will be able to address to commence this review.”

(In response to a supplementary question, Councillor Stonard referred to the answer to the question and emphasised that advertising that took place on non-council owned land could not be controlled.)

Question 18

Councillor Fox to ask the leader of the council and cabinet member for inclusive and sustainable growth the following question:

“Following the closure and relocation of the NHS vaccination centre, the council decided to maintain only the side entrance to City Hall, as this provides a ramped entrance and ensures access for anyone with mobility issues. However, this entrance is now shut at lunchtime, and I have met many people who are frustrated by that. And even worse, the front doors are of late permanently shut. For many years the front doors have stood open to this important civic building, yet now I often meet people standing perplexed outside, and have had to escort many in and out. The salary of a concierge seems like something worth spending money on when you compare it to the cost of having people feel welcome versus being excluded from democratic spaces. Will the leader commit to opening the front doors to City Hall and making the building accessible throughout the day?”

Councillor Stonard, the leader and cabinet member for inclusive and sustainable development’s response:

“Following the vacation of the NHS vaccination centre we have reviewed the customer access of city hall and the front doors will be open from Monday 19 June 2023, 9am to 5pm. In the next couple of weeks, as soon as full arrangements are in place, City Hall will no longer be closed at lunch time. The Bethel Street entrance will continue to be open as well and this includes disabled access. Our focus has been to open City Hall up to provide support to our residents.”

(By way of a supplementary question, Councillor Fox asked what other measures were being taken to ensure the building felt like one that the public could come into.

Councillor Stonard replied that the opening of the main doors made the reception area much more welcoming and bright and a greeter was being considered for this area as well.)

Question 19

Councillor Haynes to ask the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety the following question:

“Flats in the St Leonards Road area have suffered from poor maintenance from the council for many years, a fact which the council themselves acknowledge in an email from May 2023 “exacerbated by the lack of maintenance, water ingress and general state of repair.” The same email also acknowledges that “repairs are long overdue.” Although some repairs have been carried out after significant pushing from myself and from residents, many remain outstanding, and the council haven’t answered my questions about when many other outstanding issues including holes in the fabric of the buildings will be fixed. Can the council commit to answering my multiple enquiries, including an explanation of why the situation was allowed to develop, as well as to making the repairs an urgent priority?”

Councillor Jones, the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety’s response:

“Whilst we have carried out some initial repairs and will continue to undertake essential works, we are undertaking a full condition survey of the affected blocks and will be seeking to undertake an estate-based approach to block improvements including the works to the entrance porches, as the required repairs will be extensive and will require leaseholder consultation to be undertaken.

We are looking to avoid undertaking these works in isolation and take a “whole block approach” such as external decorations, high level flat roof repairs, communal decorations, lighting etc and will be looking to carry out resident engagement and leaseholder consultation. The buildings also have a local listing so we will be engaging with the conservation officers at Norwich City Council to discuss our proposals. We are planning to commence engagement by September 2023.

Outstanding enquiries from Councillor Haynes will receive a response.”

(In response to a supplementary question, Councillor Jones said that she could not comment on historical issues but would like to arrange a time to join Councillor Haynes for a visit to the property in question.)

Question 20

Councillor Calvert to ask the cabinet member for climate change the following question:

“External wall insulation saves on bills, keeps homes cosy and cuts carbon, and the council has benefited from a government scheme to provide it to some homes in the city. However, some who wanted it missed out, including

one pensioner who lives in a cold end of terrace home and has had to move bedrooms to stay warm at night.

They are left in the cold partly because there is not enough capacity within the relevant team to get sign ups from residents in need, in time for booking the work in with contractors. Will the cabinet member commit to urgently increasing capacity within the council so this kind of measure can be delivered to those who need it most?"

Councillor Hampton, the cabinet member for climate change's response:

"Thank you for this question about our Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund project which is improving living conditions for our tenants who live in homes of a 'Wimpey no-fines construction' – a type of uninsulated concrete used in the years after the war.

I can assure Councillor Calvert that the case referred to has not been brought about by any lack of capacity within internal teams. The scheme funding was limited to 43 social housing properties and, having highlighted properties most at need from the perspective of their type of construction, the allocations were made on a first come, first served basis. GDPR rules prevented the identification of individuals tenants, and so letters were sent to addresses which met the criteria. Once our tenants had verified the authenticity of the scheme, sign up was rapid.

I would appreciate Councillor Calvert providing the detail of the case he refers to, to the Environmental Strategy Team as there may be other schemes and funding sources that can be applied in this particular case."

(In response to Councillor Calvert's supplementary question, Councillor Hampton said that the grant in question had specific criteria attached and spending of the money was not to do with internal capacity. There would always be reviews of capacity and this would be taken forward through the Climate Action Plan.)

Question 21

Councillor Francis to ask the leader of the council and cabinet member for inclusive and sustainable development the following question:

"Residents regularly report to me problems of bins being left on pavements after refuse collections. On the narrow pavements of my ward, this causes significant accessibility issues for people with disabilities and those with pushchairs. When residents report this, little action seems to be taken, and there seems to be low awareness amongst residents that bins need to be brought in. What action is the council taking to ensure residents bring their bins in off pavements and that the streets remain accessible to all?"

Councillor Stonard, the leader and cabinet member for inclusive and sustainable development's response:

"The issue of wheelie bins left out on streets by residents is a challenge in a city such as Norwich with its historic network of terraced houses. We recognise that the design of these streets and houses can make it difficult to

store wheelie bins off-street between collection days, and the high turnover of residents in certain areas can make this worse.

The council provides clear guidance for residents in our waste and recycling communications about their responsibilities when presenting bins for collection. We ask residents to make sure that their bin is out by 6am on their collection day, but no earlier than 6pm the evening before. We also request that bins are taken back inside of a property boundary by 9am the next morning.

We investigate all reports of bins obstructing footways and engage with residents to ensure wherever that pavements are kept clear.”

(In response to a supplementary question, Councillor Stonard said that he was unsure whether the rationale for putting bins out and bringing them in at certain times were included on the leaflet but agreed it would be useful if it was not already.)

Question 22

Councillor Schmierer to ask the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety the following question:

“Figures from Sports England show that over 1 in 4 Norfolk adults feel lonely always, often or some of the time. These are the highest figures for any county council area in the East of England. The negative impact of loneliness on lives has been gaining greater attention in recent years. Last month, in the United States, the Surgeon General labelled loneliness, isolation and the lack of connection between people a public health crisis in the country. Recent studies around the world have shown that loneliness is linked to premature mortality, dementia and even heart disease. I note that North Yorkshire is working to tackle loneliness given the impact it has on the livelihoods of its residents. Can the cabinet member ensure that tackling loneliness is added as one of the metrics by which the success of the council’s housing teams are assessed?”

Councillor Jones, the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety response:

“North Yorkshire Council is a unitary authority responsible for adult and social care which provides them a wider remit with regard to addressing issues of isolation, in particular of vulnerable households.

That being said all Norwich’s housing staff support tenants to remain living independently as far as they are able. When we are aware that loneliness is impacting on the wellbeing of a council tenant, an officer will signpost and support them to access a range of community resources.

The Integrated Anticipatory Care Team (INTERACT) based at City Hall includes a care coordinator, Social Prescribers from Age UK, Norwich CAB, Voluntary Norfolk and One Norwich Practices and support from a clinical pharmacist. The team works in partnership with the Home Improvement Team and provides a range of measures to assist residents whose housing is having a negative impact on their health. In many cases this includes developing, expanding and maintaining social networks.

Referrals can be made via [Healthy homes referral form - Norwich City Council](#)"

(By way of a supplementary question, Councillor Schmierer asked whether the council could ensure that tackling loneliness was a metric for assessing the housing team. Councillor Jones replied that health and wellbeing work was being done, including suicide prevention work but tackling loneliness was also an important issue. She would look into this.)



Committee name: Council

Committee date: 26/09/2023

Report title: Update to Capital Programme

Portfolio: Councillor Kendrick, cabinet member for resources

Report of: Interim Chief Finance Officer and S151 Officer

Wards: All Wards

OPEN PUBLIC ITEM

Purpose

This report seeks approval for changes to the council's Capital Programme (2023/2028).

Recommendation:

That Council approves the following changes to the Capital Programme 2023/24:

- (1) an additional £20,000 be added to the 2023/24 capital programme to meet the additional costs of implementing an audio system in the Mancroft Room;
- (2) an additional £200,000 be added to the 2023/24 and 2024/25 capital programme to support phase 2 of the Enterprise Resource Planning system.

Policy framework

The council has five corporate priorities, which are:

- People live independently and well in a diverse and safe city.
- Norwich is a sustainable and healthy city.
- Norwich has the infrastructure and housing it needs to be a successful city.
- The city has an inclusive economy in which residents have equal opportunity to flourish.
- Norwich City Council is in good shape to serve the city.

This report meets the Norwich City Council is in good shape to serve the city. corporate priority.

Introduction and Background

1. The 2023 – 2028 capital programme was approved as part of the council's budget setting process by full Council in February 2023; since that time a small number of issues have arisen that require additional resources to be added to the capital programme and which therefore require full council approval.
2. In the provisional outturn report presented to Cabinet in June 2023 delegated approval was given for the Interim S151 (Chief Financial Officer) to approve requests for carry forward resources which were unspent in 2022/23 to be added to the 2023/24 programme. Discussions have now taken place and the impact of agreeing some carry forward requests are included for Cabinet and Council information.
3. On 13 September 2023, Cabinet considered the report and resolved to recommend to Council that it:
 - (a) approves the following changes to the Capital Programme 2023/24:
 - (i) an additional £20,000 be added to the 2023/24 capital programme to meet the additional costs of implementing an audio system in the Mancroft Room;
 - (ii) an additional £200,000 be added to the 2023/24 and 2024/25 capital programme to support phase 2 of the Enterprise Resource Planning system;
 - (b) notes the approved carry forwards from 2022/23 into the 2023/24 capital programmes.

Changes to the capital Programme

Improvements to the Mancroft Room (Hybrid working technology).

4. The updating of the audio equipment in the Mancroft Room, used to support effective communication and hybrid access during committee and other meetings, including webcasting, was identified as a 2022/23 capital project. A budget estimate of £40,000 was included in the programme. No project spend took place during 2022/23 whilst investigations were undertaken on a range of solutions consequently this budget has been approved for carry forward into 2023/24 and is included in the overall figures set out in the later section of this report.
5. A technical specification was drawn up and tenders invited from 2 contractors drawn from a specialist procurement framework. However, following receipt of quotations it is apparent that a further sum is necessary to implement the preferred solution. A further £20,000 is now required to be added to the capital programme to allow for the solution to be procured and to also include a contingency sum for any additional equipment that is required. Although this represents a 50% increase in costs, until the detailed work was carried out to specify the required improvements only a broad estimate could be identified.
6. The original programme was financed from capital receipts and it is proposed that this additional cost is also financed in that way. Once agreed a formal

quote can be accepted, contracts completed and the scheme can still be implemented in the current financial year.

Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) System (Phase 2 enhancements)

7. In April 2022 Cabinet approved the replacement of the council's separate finance and HR systems with a new ERP system. The initial implementation was estimated to take around 18 – 24 months. A contract was signed in May 2022 and the implementation work commenced almost immediately.
8. The project has now reached the point where the first phase of implementation; replacing the council's existing systems with the model ERP system recommended by our implementation partner, is almost ready to go live. Further phases of work are being identified to ensure that the council maximises its investment in the system through process improvements and several enhancements have already been identified:
9. To ensure continuity of the internal team it is considered necessary to secure the funding for the project in advance of the phase 1 coming to a conclusion; in this way the lessons learnt from the initial project work can be carried seamlessly into later phases. At this point in time a broad estimate of £200,000 has been proposed to cover expenditure in both 2023/24 and 2024/25 and to cover both the implementation costs of our partner (Embridge Consulting) and the internal staff time which can be capitalised against the project and which will allow business as usual backfilling to be accommodated. It is proposed to finance these costs from retained capital receipts as borrowing for short term IT projects is not a cost-effective solution.
10. The initial areas identified for phase 2 are:
 - (a) The council currently uses an external provider to deliver its payroll services (Sefton Council) During 2023 and as part of the project work extensive work was carried out to determine whether a business case demonstrated value in bringing the payroll function back in house. Due to the low cost of the current provision several non-financial benefits or risks were highlighted as the main drivers for change. In particular the number of errors and corrections needed each month and the risk that the low cost was not sustainable.
 - (b) In the event the current provider has now advised that, as part of its own restructuring proposals, the service will not be offered after April 2024; although we have asked for an interim solution to be in place until July 2024 to allow the internal team and system changes to be made. Some provision was included in the original contract which foresaw this eventuality and so some costs included within the implementation partner's contract to facilitate the system aspects of moving to a full integrated payroll solution. However, the use of internal resources to project manage and implement the changes required to processes will need additional funding.
 - (c) The council currently has an E-invoicing solution provided by V1 which is integrated within our Advanced (finance system) contract. Unit 4 has an alternative preferred provider although V1 can also be used and is in place elsewhere alongside the Unit 4 system. The basic system does not include a full e-invoicing solution and discussions have been taking place to consider the best way forward so that the process efficiencies currently

seen are not lost. One option is to negotiate the use of V1 in unit 4 as we still have a licence to use until June 2024. This would provide a quick solution and permit a full tender to take place with other suppliers subsequently.

- (d) Advanced Financial Planning (FPA) is a separate module that would bring additional functionality to our MTFs processes which are currently undertaken largely on spreadsheets.
- (e) In addition, a small number of improvements to the model solution have been deferred so as not to delay the go live date. The implementation of these non-critical changes may require some additional resources from our implementation partner but will mainly require the existing internal resources to continue to be available.
- (f) The additional requirement for this second phase of work has been estimated at £200,000 and this includes both the additional costs of implementing the system changes (implementation partner costs) as well as the resources necessary to work on the project (including backfilling costs) to ensure that the investment and improvement is delivered quickly and effectively.
- (g) Efficiency savings have already been included as part of previously agreed savings programmes to ensure that processes efficiency across all council services are realised and these changes will also facilitate those savings.
- (h) For all these improvements the system will be enhanced and therefore the costs can be capitalised. The original financing for the project was via capital receipts and it is proposed to continue this approach.

11. During August meetings were held between budget managers and the Interim Chief Finance Officer to understand their requests to carry forward unspent resources from 2022/23 into 2023/24. The need to deliver more closely against the capital programme budgets has been recognised for a while to ensure that outcomes are maximised, and treasury management activities are as effective as possible.

12. Following these discussions proposed carry forwards of £16.7m have been agreed as set out in Table 1 below and these will be added to the capital programme and reported in the Q2 budget management report. In addition, there was accelerated expenditure against budgets for programmes of work by Lion Homes following the receipt of additional grant; this over delivery in 2022/23 has been offset against the expenditure which was programmed in 2023/24. As a result the net carry forward agreed is £14.5m.

Table 1 – Agreed carry forward requests

Proposed Carry forward	£'000
GF - Community Services	3,404.75
GF - Corporate and Commercial Services	64.74
GF - Development and City Services	6,387.59
HRA - Development and City Services	1,309.74
HRA - Community Services	5,541.22
	16,708.03

Reprofiling required due to accelerated 2022/23 expenditure	
HRA - Development and City Services	-2,230.74
	-2,230.74
<hr/>	
Total Movement	14,477.29

13. Further work to refine the profiling of 2023/24 expenditure including the agreed carry forward sums is being undertaken in the Autumn.

Consultation

14. No additional consultation has been undertaken in respect of the report proposals.

Implications

Financial and resources

15. Any decision to reduce or increase resources or alternatively increase income must be made within the context of the council's stated priorities, as set out in its Corporate Plan 2022-26 and budget.

16. The recommendations (A and B) to increase the capital programme by £220,000 is proposed to be met from unapplied capital receipts; the CFO confirms that there are sufficient available to meet this level of expenditure.

17. In relation to the projects carried forward from 2022/23 to 2023/24, the financing associated with the scheme expenditure, will also be carried forward with no overall changes required. Where carry forwards have not been agreed the associated financing will be available for alternative proposals.

Legal

18. In relation to the proposed increases in resources; recommendations A and B, only the council has the power to vary the level of capital programme budgets, unless it relates to a scheme where external funding which fully matches any increase is available in which case the cabinet can approve the change to the programme.

Statutory considerations

Consideration	Details of any implications and proposed measures to address:
Equality and diversity	There are no specific equality and diversity implications arising from this report. Where individual schemes in the capital programme have implications related to this statutory condition they will be considered as part of the appropriate scheme assessment.

Consideration	Details of any implications and proposed measures to address:
Health, social and economic impact	There are no specific health, social and economic implications arising from this report. Where individual schemes in the capital programme have implications related to this statutory condition they will be considered as part of the appropriate scheme assessment.
Crime and disorder	There are no specific crime and disorder implications arising from this report. Where individual schemes in the capital programme have implications related to this statutory condition, including the role of the crime reduction partnership, they will be considered as part of the appropriate scheme assessment.
Children and adults safeguarding	There are no specific safeguarding implications arising from this report. Where individual schemes in the capital programme have implications related to this statutory condition they will be considered as part of the appropriate scheme assessment.
Environmental impact	There are no specific environmental implications arising from this report. Where individual schemes in the capital programme have implications related to this statutory condition they will be considered as part of the appropriate scheme assessment.

Risk management

Risk	Consequence	Controls Required
Financial	Capital resources are not effectively used.	<p>Financing options for proposed expenditure takes account of the availability and suitability of the funding sources.</p> <p>Budget management identifies variances and informs appropriate management actions.</p>

Other options considered

19. Consideration has been given to alternative ways of delivering schemes; for example reducing the scope of the Mancroft Room audio scheme to match the budget or not proceeding with further development of the ERP system. The proposals in this report reflect the view of officers on the appropriate levels of investment to achieve the intended outcomes from those schemes.

20. The requests for the carry forward of resources has considered the extent to which the council is already committed contractually to scheme expenditure or whether the scheme continues to meet the corporate plan objectives.

Reasons for the decision/recommendation

21. Management of capital expenditure is dependent on approved resources being in place and reflected in the capital programme so that progress and variances can be measured effectively.

22. Only the Council can approve increases to the capital programme. Delegated authority was given to the Interim Chief Finance Officer to agree carry forward requests and so the level of carry forward agreed is included to ensure that the cabinet and council continue to have visibility on the level of capital resources being expended.

Background papers: None

Appendices: None

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Committee Name: Council
Committee Date: 26/09/2023
Report Title: Annual Report of the Audit Committee 2022-2023

Committee chair **Councillor Price**

Report of: Head of Legal and Procurement

Wards: All Wards

OPEN PUBLIC ITEM

Purpose

This report presents the Annual Report of the Audit Committee 2022/2023, appended to this report at Appendix A, to Council.

Recommendation:

It is recommended that council receives the Annual Report of the Audit Committee 2022/2023.

Policy Framework

The Council has five corporate priorities, which are:

- People live independently and well in a diverse and safe city.
- Norwich is a sustainable and healthy city.
- Norwich has the infrastructure and housing it needs to be a successful city.
- The city has an inclusive economy in which residents have equal opportunity to flourish.
- Norwich City Council is in good shape to serve the city.

This report meets the corporate priority to ensure Norwich City Council is in good shape to serve the city.

Report Details

1. On 11 March 2014, the Audit Committee resolved to approve new procedures for the Audit Committee in line with Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) guidance. The CIPFA guidance says that:

“The purpose of an Audit Committee is to provide to those charged with governance independent assurance on the adequacy of the risk management framework, the internal control environment and the integrity of the financial reporting and annual governance processes.”
2. The guidance goes on to set out that the core functions of the Audit Committee are to:
 - a) Be satisfied that the authority’s assurance statements, including the Annual Governance Statement, properly reflect the risk environment and any actions required to improve it, and demonstrate how governance supports the achievements of the authority’s objectives.
 - b) In relation to the authority’s internal audit functions:
 - i) oversee its independence, objectivity, performance and professionalism;
 - ii) support the effectiveness of the internal audit process;
 - iii) promote the effective use of internal audit within the assurance framework.
 - c) Consider the effectiveness of the authority’s risk management arrangements and the control environment. Review the risk profile of the organisation and assurances that action is being taken on risk-related issues, including partnerships with other organisations.
 - d) Monitor the effectiveness of the control environment, including arrangements for ensuring value for money and for managing the authority’s exposure to the risks of fraud and corruption.
 - e) Consider the reports and recommendations of external audit and inspection agencies and their implications for governance, risk management or control
3. The Council delegates authority to the Audit Committee to undertake a range of functions on its behalf, including approval of the Annual Statement of Accounts and Annual Governance Statement. It is therefore important the council ensures that the Audit Committee is discharging its role effectively.
4. The attached annual report of the Audit Committee 2022-2023 was approved by members of the Audit Committee at their meeting on 11 July 2023.

5. The report sets out the work of the Audit Committee over the last financial year, providing assurance to council on the work undertaken by the committee.
6. The report concludes that the committee has been effective in undertaking the functions set out in its terms of reference, in accordance with the council's procedure rules and the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015.

Consultation

7. This report has been written in consultation with the chair and vice chair of the committee and based on discussions recorded in the minutes of meetings of the committee. At its meeting on 11 July 2023, the committee approved the report and recommends it to council.

Implications

Financial and Resources

Any decision to reduce or increase resources or alternatively increase income must be made within the context of the council's stated priorities, as set out in its Corporate Plan and Budget.

8. There are no proposals in this report that would reduce or increase resources.

Legal

9. The role of the Audit Committee is an important part of the Council's arrangements to ensure proper administration of its financial affairs under s.151 of the Local Government Act 1972. The annual report of the committee is considered to be good practice as identified by the Chartered Institute for Public Finance and Accountancy and is reflected in the council's constitution.

Statutory Considerations

Consideration:	Details of any implications and proposed measures to address:
Equality and Diversity	No implications arising from this report
Health, Social and Economic Impact	No implications arising from this report
Crime and Disorder	No implications arising from this report
Children and Adults Safeguarding	No implications arising from this report
Environmental Impact	No implications arising from this report

Risk Management

Risk	Consequence	Controls Required
Include operational, financial, compliance, security, legal, political or reputational risks to the council	None	None

Other Options Considered

10. This report is for information and consolidates information set out in minutes to the Audit Committee held in the period April 2022 to May 2023.

Reasons for the decision/recommendation

11. To provide an annual report to council.

Background papers:

12. Minutes and reports to the Audit Committee meetings held from April 2022 to May 2023.

Appendices:

A Annual Report of the Audit Committee 2022-2023

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Annual Report of the Audit Committee 2022-23

Introduction

This is the annual report of the Audit Committee and advises the Council of the work of the committee for the period of the civic year 2022-23

Councillor Ben Price
Chair, Audit Committee

Councillor Keith Driver
Vice-chair, Audit Committee

Report to full council on the committee's performance in relation to the terms of reference and effectiveness of the committee in meeting its purpose.¹

1. This report covers the work of the Audit Committee for the financial and civic year 2022-23. The production of an annual report by the committee is considered good practice.
2. The Council established an Audit Committee in 2007. The terms of reference were considered and revised as part of the Constitution Review in 2021. The committee exercises its powers within the policy framework of the council and the corporate plan, as specified in the terms of reference.
3. The members of the Audit Committee in 2022-23 were:

Councillor Ben Price (chair)
Councillor Keith Driver (vice chair)
Councillor Rachel Everett
Councillor Ash Haynes
Councillor Claire Kidman
Councillor Mike Sands
Councillor Ian Stutely
Councillor James Wright

David Harwood, Independent Person
4. Councillor Champion substituted for Councillor Haynes at the meeting on 12 July 2023.
5. Councillor Paul Kendrick, Cabinet Member for Resources, attended all meetings of the committee.
6. The key officers who supported the Audit Committee during this period were:

Annabel Scholes, Executive Director Corporate and Commercial Services (to December 2022)
Neville Murton, Interim Head of Finance, Audit and Risk and from January 2023, Interim Chief Finance Officer (S151 Officer)
Faye Haywood, Head of Internal Audit (Eastern Internal Audit Services)
Leah Mickleborough, Head of Legal and Procurement
Gareth Robinson, Interim Head of Finance (Deputy S151 Officer) from February 2023
7. The engagement team of the external auditors (Ernst & Young LLP) is led by David Rigler, who has replaced Mark Hodgson. The committee is grateful to Mark Hodgson for his work on the council's external audits and valuable advice to the chair and members of the committee.
8. There were four formal meetings of the committee during the civic year 2022-23 as follows:

¹ Taken from the Audit Committee's Terms of Reference, Norwich City Council Constitution

12 July 2022
4 October 2022
29 November 2022
21 March 2023

9. The information contained in this report is drawn from the minutes and reports considered at committee meetings held during the year. Agendas, reports, and minutes for the meetings are available on the council's website:

<https://cmis.norwich.gov.uk/live/Meetingscalendar.aspx>

10. The Audit Committee has undertaken its second self-assessment exercise against CIPFA checklist to be satisfied that the committee is performing effectively.
11. This report sets out the committee's performance in relation to the terms of reference and effectiveness of the committee in meeting its purpose, under the following headings:
- (a) Corporate governance
 - (b) Internal and external audit
 - (c) Statement of accounts
 - (d) Referral powers and accountability arrangements.
12. Extracts from the terms of reference have been used to introduce each section.

Corporate Governance

Review the effectiveness of internal control across the council and the adequacy of actions taken to address any weaknesses or control failures.

13. The committee reviews the effectiveness of internal control across the council through its receipt of the Annual Governance Statement and associated action plan, the Code of Corporate Governance, Risk Management reports and the reports of internal audit and external audit.
14. In July 2022, the committee approved the Code of Corporate Governance. It is a non-statutory document that informs the Annual Governance Statement (AGS). The production of a Code of Corporate Governance demonstrates the Council's commitment to effective corporate governance and the review process enables it to reflect on its systems and practices, identifying potential areas for improvement.
15. On 2 March 2023, members of the committee participated in a workshop as part of the preparation of the Annual Governance Statement and annual review of the Code of Corporate Governance. This will feed into production of the Annual Governance Statement for 2022/23

Review, consider and agree the Annual Governance Statement, including the adequacy of the corporate governance framework and improvement action plan contained within it.

16. The Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 requires the council to produce an Annual Governance Statement (AGS). It summarises the extent to which the council complies with its Code of Corporate Governance and details, as appropriate, any significant actions needed to improve the governance arrangements in the year ahead. It provides a public facing statement on how well the council has delivered on governance over the course of the previous year and accompanies the Statement of Accounts (SoA).
17. In October 2022, the committee considered the draft AGS which reflects the governance arrangements, effectiveness of internal controls and risk management in the year 2021/2022. Members have been assured that the final AGS, which will be signed off with the audited SoA, will be updated to include the identification of any significant risks and concerns that affect the governance arrangements of the council.
18. The AGS is prepared in accordance with the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) framework. The review of the Code of Corporate Governance is an important part of this process. The statement is prepared by the Head of Legal and Procurement and circulated to officers, the corporate leadership team (CLT) and the Leader of the Council before the draft is published for public consultation as required. Members discussed whether the process should be included in the AGS as it was a public facing document and noted that there was no statutory requirement to do so but that it would be included in the covering report.
19. An action plan is included in the AGS to ensure that recommendations for improvement are taken forward. Those internal audit reviews which received a limited assurance in 2021/2022 were reflected in the AGS for 2021/22.
20. The committee approves the AGS, which is signed by the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive at the time that the audited accounts are approved by the committee.

Consider the adequacy and effectiveness of the council's arrangements for the identification and management of the organisation's business risks, including the risk management policy, strategy and risk register.

Receive and consider regular reports at least twice a year on the risk environment, corporate risk register and associated management actions.

21. The council's constitution adopted in March 2021, formalised the committee's request to receive a report on the council's risk management policy, strategy and register twice a year. This provides the committee assurance about the risk appetite of the council and an opportunity to ask questions on the application of scores to risks and raise concerns that the committee may have.
22. Cabinet receives the risk register as part of its quarterly Corporate Assurance Reports. The Audit Committee's responsibilities differ from the cabinet members, who are the owners of the risk register. Members of the Audit Committee have an oversight capacity to provide assurance on the governance

of risks. To do this the committee needs to be up to date with the council's risk profile and review the effectiveness of risk management options taken and to support good risk management practice. Members of the committee are aware that the risk register is regularly monitored by each directorate and the Corporate Leadership Team and the process for escalating risks.

23. The committee considered the risk register at its meetings in October 2022 and March 2023. The committee is aware of the external risks to the council from CORP 20 Cost of Living crisis, CORP21 Equality Impacts to Climate Change and CORP 23 Impact on Economic Downturn on Key Council Suppliers, as highlighted by the Cabinet Member for Resources, are outside the cabinet's control. The process for assessing risks has an element of subjectivity and the committee considers that it would be useful for the committee reports to include more information on Cabinet's process in scoring risks and what mitigation it considered and either selected or rejected.

Review and ensure the adequacy of the anti-fraud and corruption policy and strategy and the effectiveness of their application.

Review and ensure that adequate arrangements are established and operating to deal with situations of suspected or actual fraud and corruption.

24. Work of internal audit was reported to every meeting throughout the year. The reports are to contain updates on any overdue recommendations with a management response and new implementation dates, going forward.
25. When considering the External Audit Plan 2021/22, members were advised that there was no change in focus areas from the previous year, except for Accounting for Covid-19 related government grants where the risk has been reduced from the previous year.
26. At its meeting in November 2022, the committee received assurance that the council had adopted the right approach to managing the risk of fraud and error in the payment of Coronavirus business grants. The Head of Revenues and Benefits reported that the council's identification of fraudulent claims or grants paid out in error was less than 1 per cent of the total. The level of fraud was low and had been less in the later schemes due to the processes put in place to pre-check applications. The committee also noted the work being undertaken to recover funding from identified cases of fraud or overpaid cases. In November this stood at £91,000. Cases where the council had been unable to recover funding after three attempts were passed on to the Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) for enforcement.
27. The Head of Legal and Procurement provided an Annual Report on Fraudulent Activity to the committee (11 July 2023). This is good practice and will be taken forward.
28. In addition, the committee received independent assurance from the Internal Audit Team on the council's Counter Fraud and Corruption arrangements. Recommendations from this audit are being tracked through to completion by the committee.

Receive periodic updates on improvement actions taken.

29. The council has identified a need to strengthen competencies and make improvements in the way in which contracts are managed effectively to drive out efficiencies and service improvements. This will continue to be an area of internal audit focus given recent limited assurance opinions for the management significant contracts. This reflects the committee's concerns about contract management and policies and procedures.
30. At its meeting in July 2022, the committee received the report of the Head of Legal and Procurement on the *Review of Contract Management*. The committee has had concerns about contract management which needed to be addressed. Lessons have been learned and the application of these procedures reduces the corporate risk across the council. Council officers involved in contract management or procurement were able to participate in the government's Contract Management Pioneer Programme, which provided the council with training and support to the value of £7,000 per participant. An internal contract management group had been established to support colleagues. The measures also included ongoing training, contract monitoring and performance reviews.
31. The committee has welcomed the actions of the Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) to strengthen governance arrangements throughout the council and its wholly owned companies, including the setting up of the quarterly meetings of the shareholder panels. The committee has noted that there is no internal audit review planned for 2023/24 of the outcomes of the Local Government Peer Review conducted in January 2023, but there is an expectation that some of the concerns raised may be addressed through the internal audit reviews of Corporate Governance and Lion Homes (Norwich) Limited (formerly Norwich Regeneration Ltd).

Internal and external audit

Approve the internal audit charter.

Approve and monitor delivery of the internal audit strategy.

32. The Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 require that "a relevant authority must undertake an effective internal audit to evaluate the effectiveness of its risk management, control and governance processes, taking into account public sector internal auditing standards or guidance".
33. The committee approved the Internal Audit Charter and the Internal Audit Strategy at its meeting on 21 March 2023. The Charter is a mandatory document which sets out how Eastern Internal Audit Services (EIAS) will deliver internal audit services to the council, and outlines the internal audit purpose, authority, and responsibilities of the internal auditors. The strategy is a strategic high-level statement on how the internal audit service will be delivered and developed in accordance with the charter and how it links to the organisational objectives and priorities. The strategy includes the annual internal audit work plan and long-term plan, to provide a rolling programme.

Consider, endorse, and monitor delivery of the internal audit annual work programme, including any significant in-year changes to the programme or resource requirements.

Ensure adequate resourcing of the internal audit function, approving any

significant additional consulting services requested from internal audit not already included in the internal audit annual work programme.

34. As well as receiving quarterly updates, the committee also receives updates which track internal audit recommendations that are either medium or high priority and have gone past the due date. This provides the committee with an opportunity to monitor the progress against actions or seek an explanation where implementation of recommendations has been delayed or why actions have not been agreed by management.
35. The Head of Internal Audit presents any changes to the agreed internal audit work plan to the committee as part of the quarterly progress reports. The three-year programme allows for the plan to be re-prioritised to provide the assurance needs of the council so that internal audit focuses on the most strategic risks in year and make best use of its resources. The committee is asked to consider if these and if there are any other areas of strategic risk which could form part of the discussion with Corporate Leadership Team.

Receive and consider the annual internal audit report and opinion on behalf of the council.

36. At its July 2022 meeting, the committee considered the Internal Audit Annual Report and Opinion 2021/22. This report sets out the work that had been undertaken by internal audit in 2021/22, the recommendations for management and contributes to the AGS. The council received an audit opinion of reasonable assurance, with the committee noting that internal audit reviews of Payroll and Housing Benefits had been carried over into 2022/23.

Oversee the annual review of the effectiveness of the system of internal audit, to include the performance of the internal audit function, compliance with standards and delivery of improvement actions.

37. The committee commented on the Internal Audit Annual Report and Opinion 2021/22 and noted that the opinion was caveated with the internal audits reviews of Payroll and Housing Benefits being carried over to 2022/23. Members also considered that it was appropriate that as disruption caused by Covid-19 had still been an issue in the year and that reference should be made in the report.
38. Members expressed some concern that the internal work plan had a delayed start in 2021/22 due to the new internal audit arrangements, and that this had meant that some internal audit reviews had been deferred to the next year. Members appreciate the approach taken by the Head of Internal Audit to ensure that medium and high-level audit recommendations are included in the quarterly reports until the actions have been completed.

Contribute to the external quality assessment of internal audit that takes place every five years.

39. Eastern Internal Audit Services (EIAS) was fully assessed by the Chartered Institute of Internal Auditors in October 2022. The conclusion of the review was:

“EIAS conforms with the vast majority of the Standards, as well as the Definition, Core Principles and the Code of Ethics, which form the mandatory

elements of the PSIAS and the Institute of Internal Auditors' International Professional Practices Framework (IPPF), the globally recognised standard of quality in Internal Auditing”.

40. The next External Quality Assessment is scheduled for October 2027.

Commission work from internal and external audit and consider the resulting reports.

41. The committee has not commissioned any specific reports from external audit but is aware that there is broad agreement on the significant risks to the council which is reflected in the External Audit's Audit Results Report and the internal audit work programme.
42. The committee was grateful to take up the offer of the Head of Internal Audit to undertake the committee self-assessment exercise. The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) document on “audit committee's practical guidance for local authorities and police” sets out the guidance on the function and the operation of audit committees. It is therefore good practice to complete a regular self-assessment exercise against the checklist, to be satisfied that the committee is performing effectively. In addition, the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards also calls for the committee to assess their remit and effectiveness, in relation to Purpose, Authority and Responsibility.
43. This is the second time that the Audit Committee has undertaken the self-assessment exercise, facilitated by the Head of Internal Audit, and as a result, further actions have been identified to ensure full compliance with best practice. These actions were approved at the meeting in March 2023. It is intended that the committee will carry out the self-assessment exercise on an annual basis and monitor progress against actions as part of its work programme planning.
44. In June 2022, to enhance the knowledge skills and independence of the committee, the council appointed David Harwood, as an independent person to the committee. He has made a valuable contribution to meetings of the committee and informal sessions. This was an action arising from the self-assessment exercise. The council is ahead of other local authorities in making this appointment before it becomes standard practice. The committee has expressed an interest in appointing a second independent person and it will be progressed this year. The committee suggested that it would be useful for the personal specification to stipulate that accountancy skills would be desirable.
45. Council agreed to establish the Treasury Management Committee at its meeting in September 2022. The Audit Committee following its self-assessment recommended that the introduction of a Treasury Management Committee may be helpful to support the development of the council's Treasury Management Strategy, and to examine in greater depth how the council is performing against its strategy. The Chair of the Audit Committee is a member of the Treasury Management Committee which also comprises: the Leader of the Council, the Cabinet member for Resources, the Chair of Scrutiny Committee, and one other member from the administration in line with the political balance of the council.
46. In conclusion, the Audit Committee self-assessment has indicated that the committee considers that it is acting in line with best practice in most areas and can demonstrate that it is adding value to the council through its role. This

exercise is carried out annually and improvement actions tracked in the committee's workplan.

Comment on the scope and depth of external audit work and ensure it gives value for money.

47. The committee is satisfied with the assurance provided by External Audit in its audit of the financial statements that make up the AGS and the Statement of Accounts. The chair has stated that he has confidence in external audit's work and appreciates the need to validate information for themselves. The council has two wholly owned companies, and it is the view of the chair that the audit process needs to change. The audit of the group accounts (the audited accounts of the wholly owned companies) does not subject the accounts to the same level of detailed audit as the council's Statement of Accounts.
48. The committee has commented on the increase in the level of fees set by the Public Sector Audit Appointments (PSAA). External Audit has advised that investment and commercial activities of councils has complicated the audit process. There are good communications between the external audit team and the council's finance team to ensure a smooth audit.

Ensure that there are effective relationships between external and internal audit, inspection agencies and other relevant bodies, and that the value of the audit process is actively promoted.

49. The committee is satisfied that the relationship between external and internal audit is effective and that audits are conducted in accordance with the relevant requirements.

Seek assurance that action has been taken to implement the recommendations arising from the findings of significant audit and inspection work.

50. Actions arising from internal and external audit reviews are followed up as part of the AGS and the quarterly internal audit plans.
51. The committee monitors actions through the internal audit quarterly reports. The committee is concerned with delays in implementing actions arising from internal audit reviews and that this could increase the risk to the authority. It has therefore been agreed that managers will be invited to attend a committee meeting to explain why they have not implemented actions within the timescale agreed.
52. The committee noted at its meeting (29 November 2022) that there were two internal audit reviews from 2021/2022, NC2213 Environmental Services and NC2219 Capital Programme Management and Accounting, that had each received a limited assurance. Members expressed concern that regarding Capital Programme Management and Accounting, records of meetings had not been kept. During discussion on the internal audit review of Environmental Services members noted that it was a large, frontline contract (valued at £6.6 million) but expressed dismay about the number of outstanding actions and that there was a recommendation for the council to undertake an independent verification that key performance indicators (KPIs). Members were advised that most of the actions had been completed but that internal audit was waiting for

evidence of this. Mitigation included the provision of refresher training on contract management to relevant officers.

Statement of Accounts

Discuss the annual audit plan for the audit of the financial statements with external audit.

53. The committee considered the Annual External Audit Plan 2021/22 at its meeting on 29 November 2022 and approved the approach and scope of the external audit as proposed in the audit plan and confirmed its understanding and agreement to the materiality reporting levels set out in the report.
54. The statutory deadline for the publication of the 2021/2022 audited accounts by 30 November 2022 was not met as the audit has not yet started. Members are aware of the national and sector issues in undertaking statutory audits, which are not specific to this council, but will affect the delivery of external audits for the next couple of years as external audit puts an improvement plan in place. Members are frustrated that the council should be in this position as it has submitted its accounts by the statutory deadline each year. It was agreed that a notice would be placed on the council's website to explain the delay in auditing the accounts to members of the public.
55. During discussion the External Auditor explained the statement "Effects of climate related matters on financial statements and Value for Money arrangements" and said that this was an area of increasing work on audits. Unlike the private sector, local authorities were not yet required to provide a sustainability report. Under Value for Money, where councils have declared a climate emergency, the auditors would report if there was no expenditure on climate change of a statement in the key strategic aims.
56. The Interim Head of Finance reported to the committee (*State of the Audit Landscape and Norwich Closure*, 21 March 2023) which updated the committee on the wider audit environment, both private and public, and the impact that it had on the closure of the accounts. The current situation is not sustainable in the long term and that the delay in conducting audits was expected to be improved within the next 2 to 3 years. Members commented that it was unfair for the councils that submitted accounts by the deadline of 31 May to be penalised by having to wait for over a year to be audited. This council has consistently submitted its accounts on time.

Consider the external auditor's annual letter, relevant reports and the report to those charged with governance.

57. The council has not received the External Auditors' Annual Letter or audit results report during the period covered by this report.
58. The chair responded to a letter from the External Auditor regarding the committee's understanding of the governance arrangements of the council.

Review and approve the annual statement of accounts, including subsequent amendments on behalf of the council.

59. The committee considers the draft financial statements before publication and submission to external audit. There is no requirement for the committee to

approve the unaudited accounts, but this gives an opportunity for members to understand the process.

60. The committee considered the draft Statement of Accounts (SoA) 2021-22 at its meeting in October 2022. It is a credit to the finance team that they produced the draft accounts to meet the statutory timeframe for the publication of the accounts at the same time as the previous year's accounts were subject to approval (Audit Committee, 17 May 2022).

Referral Powers and Accountability Arrangements

Make recommendations for due consideration on all matters described above.

Report to those charged with governance on the committee's findings, conclusions and recommendations concerning the effectiveness of their governance, risk management and internal control frameworks, financial reporting arrangements and internal and external audit functions.

61. The committee's discussions and recommendations relating to the effectiveness of the governance, risk management and internal control frameworks, financial reporting arrangements and internal and external audit, are recorded in the minutes of the meetings. Where appropriate the committee's recommendations on any of these matters are referred to Cabinet or the Chief Finance Officer, as set out in the terms of reference. Meetings are attended by the key officers and other members of the corporate leadership team and senior managers, internal and external audit, who contribute to the discussions and are accountable for ensuring that the committee's recommendations are given due consideration.
62. The chair and vice chair meet with the key officers to discuss agenda items and the committee's work plan.
63. The Cabinet Member for Resources also attends all meetings of the audit committee.

Conclusion

64. The committee has been effective in undertaking the functions set out in the terms of reference in accordance with the council's procedure rules and the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015.



Committee Name: Council

Committee Date: 26/09/2023

Report Title: Annual Report of the Scrutiny Committee 2022/23

Committee chair: Councillor Ackroyd (current) / Councillor Wright (former chair)

Report of: Head of Legal and Procurement

Wards: All Wards

OPEN PUBLIC ITEM

Purpose

For council to receive the Annual Report of the Scrutiny Committee 2022-23.

Recommendation:

It is recommended that council receives the Annual Report of the Scrutiny Committee 2022-23.

Policy Framework

The Council has five corporate priorities, which are:

- People live independently and well in a diverse and safe city.
- Norwich is a sustainable and healthy city.
- Norwich has the infrastructure and housing it needs to be a successful city.
- The city has an inclusive economy in which residents have equal opportunity to flourish.
- Norwich City Council is in good shape to serve the city.

This report meets the Norwich City Council is in good shape to serve the city corporate priority.

Report Details

1. The council's constitution states that the Scrutiny Committee will report annually to Council on its work.
2. The publication of an annual report is considered to be good practice.
3. The attached annual report (appendix A) reports on the work and progress that has been made by the Scrutiny Committee for the 2022-23 civic year and Council is asked to receive and note the report.

Consultation

4. This report has been written based on discussion minuted at meetings of the Scrutiny Committee.

Implications

Financial and Resources

Any decision to reduce or increase resources or alternatively increase income must be made within the context of the council's stated priorities, as set out in its Corporate Plan and Budget.

5. There are no proposals in this report that would reduce or increase resources.

Legal

6. The Council has a duty to publish an annual report for the Scrutiny Committee.

Statutory Considerations

Consideration	Details of any implications and proposed measures to address:
Equality and Diversity	Neutral impact
Health, Social and Economic Impact	Neutral impact
Crime and Disorder	Neutral impact
Children and Adults Safeguarding	Neutral impact
Environmental Impact	Neutral impact

Risk Management

Risk	Consequence	Controls Required
None	None	None

Other Options Considered

7. This report is for information and consolidates information from meetings of the Scrutiny Committee.

Reasons for the decision/recommendation

8. To provide an annual report to Council.

Background papers: None

Appendices: Appendix A: Annual Report of the Scrutiny Committee 2022-23

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Norwich City Council
Scrutiny Committee Annual Report 2022/23

Chair's Foreword:

I would like to begin by thanking all those who have been involved with the scrutiny process during the last civic year, particularly those officers and members who have subsequently left the council. Their collective effort has been hugely valuable to our work.

Despite changes to the legislation following Covid-19 that required council meetings to take place only in person, the committee members continued to make use of the technology we had become accustomed to during the pandemic to enable us to hear from those witnesses unable to attend in person.

The broadcast of meetings via YouTube also continues and gives members of the public an opportunity to watch our proceedings at a time / place that suits them.

Much of the work undertaken by the committee this year continued to be framed in the context of COVID-19, with the committee providing scrutiny for the **review of the environmental strategy following COVID-19**, a report into **the emerging new social agenda following COVID-19**, and **a sustainable, inclusive economy following COVID-19**.

One meeting that was able to take a hybrid approach was the scrutiny into **air pollution from woodburning**. The committee was able to take in-person evidence from Emeritus Professor Claire Reeves from the UEA, and from the council's public protection team at the July meeting but reconvene in September to hear online from the Stoves Industry Association and the member of the public who had introduced us to the topic. It is the opinion of the chair that this significantly aided us when arriving at recommendations.

Throughout the year, the committee has also looked at various standing items that feed into the transformation and budget setting process, with members making recommendations to cabinet that help shape and strengthen the work of the council.

Following each meeting, recommendations from the committee were considered by the cabinet, and broadly accepted.

Groups of councillors also serve on select committees outside of the main scrutiny meeting, and one was convened to look at **fly-tipping and communal bins**, an issue that was introduced to us by members of the public from the West Pottergate area. Whilst it is disappointing that this work could not be concluded

during the 2021-22 civic year, the chair looks forward to positive outcomes in the next civic year.

Whilst most of our meetings are scheduled, we do from time to time consider call-ins of cabinet decisions, and convene extraordinary meetings as necessary. As detailed in this document, one such extraordinary meeting was to consider the council's self-referral to the Regulator for Social Housing following investigation into compliance. Following lengthy scrutiny, a series of recommendations were made and adopted by the cabinet.

I commend this annual review and hope that members feel able to adopt it.

Councillor James Wright (Chair 2022-23 civic year)

Background

1. This report covers the work of the scrutiny committee for the civic year 2022-23. The production of an annual report is to fulfil the statutory obligation to publish such a report.
2. Members of scrutiny committee were as follows:
 - Councillor Wright (chair)
 - Councillor Brociek-Coulton (vice chair)
 - Councillor Carlo
 - Councillor Driver
 - Councillor Fulton-McAlister (M)
 - Councillor Galvin
 - Councillor Huntley
 - Councillor Osborn
 - Councillor Padda
 - Councillor Stutely
 - Councillor Thomas (Va)
 - Councillor Thomas (Vi)
 - Councillor Young
3. Membership of the scrutiny committee is politically balanced and made up of councillors of each political party of the council. In line with the constitution any substitutions to the committee were non-executive members of the council. Members of the cabinet were invited to attend committee meetings when the topic of the meeting was within their portfolio.
4. The committee met monthly on Thursdays from 4.30pm (excluding April and August). The majority of the meetings during the civic year 2022-23 took place in person, the session on green financing was held remotely and committee undertook a visit to a community café for the refugee and asylum seeker item.

What is scrutiny?

5. The Local Government Act 2000 introduced a structure within Local Government for decision-making and accountability and created a separation between the cabinet role and the non-executive member role.
6. Moving forward, subsequent acts of parliament have come in to extend the remit of scrutiny along with its statutory responsibilities. For example, local government scrutiny committees can now look at the work of partner organisations as well. The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 enabled local authorities to scrutinise other partners and agencies. This, along with other legislation relating to scrutiny powers has now been consolidated in the Localism Act 2011.
7. The cabinet proposes and implements policies, and the non-executive members review policies and scrutinise decisions or pre scrutinise proposed decisions of the cabinet.

8. The committee sets its own work programme via suggestions from councillors, the cabinet and council, or from other issues of public interest. Any scrutiny topic that is undertaken needs to add value, and in considering suggestions for scrutiny the committee will ascertain the reasons why the matter would benefit from scrutiny, and what outcomes might be generated from inclusion to the work programme or other scrutiny activity.
9. The scrutiny committee assists non-executive and cabinet members in accordance with the Act by:
 - a) Acting as a critical friend by challenging performance and helping improve services
 - b) Ensuring policies are working as intended and, where there are gaps help develop policy
 - c) Bringing a wide perspective, from the city's residents and stakeholders and examining broader issues affecting local communities
 - d) Acting as a consultative body
10. In carrying out its role, the scrutiny committee can request written information and ask questions of those who make decisions. The committee is also enabled to comment and make recommendations to decision makers. These decision makers include cabinet, partners and other statutory organisations. Successful scrutiny is collaboration between the scrutiny committee, the cabinet, residents, partners and the officers of the council.

Key themes for the civic year 2022-23

11. The committee looked at a broad range of issues during the civic year 2022-23. These were a mixture of recurring items along with items the committee had set as its work programme for the year.
12. The overarching themes of the topics discussed during the year were:
 - a) Terms of reference for select committees
 - b) Communal bins and Fly-tipping
 - c) County Lines drug dealing, drug addiction and vulnerable women and girls
 - d) Debt advice and support and debt recovery
 - e) NRL Business Plan 2023-2033
 - f) Financing for renewable energy/energy efficiency
 - g) Welcoming refugees into Norwich and overcoming obstacles to their smooth integration

h) Recurring items

13. This report will discuss each of these areas in turn.

Terms of reference for select committees

14. At the 9 June 2022 meeting the committee looked at and agreed a terms of reference for scrutiny select committees.
15. This detailed how to structure, convene and operate these working groups. The reports and minutes of the meeting can be found [here](#).

Communal bins and Fly-tipping

16. The scrutiny committee meeting in July 2022 looked at the outcome of the select committee task and finish group on communal bins and fly-tipping. The agenda and the minutes of the meeting can be found [here](#).
17. The task and finish group was formed to investigate the Council's approach to managing fly-tipping particularly within its own estates.
18. It considered a number of recommendations to make to cabinet and a public survey was conducted on the council's website to gather resident's opinions on these.
19. At the July meeting committee agreed a number of recommendations to make to cabinet as follows:
- a) That the council decision in February 2007 to discontinue Waste Amnesty collections in areas of highest fly-tipping incidence is reviewed
 - b) The number, locations, and types of bins in communal areas are reviewed in the fly-tipping hotspots identified, as well as developing designs for storage areas that prevent and deter fly-tipping
 - c) Pre Covid enforcement arrangements for fly-tipping are re-established, and expanded to include the use of CCTV
 - d) Arrangements for engaging with residents with regards to fly-tipping are reviewed and improved, including consultation on proposed actions arising from this report. This should include improved partnership working between Citywide Services and Housing Estate Management in the design of services and facilities to reduce fly-tipping in our Housing Estates
 - e) Local facilities for upcycling and reuse of unwanted items are considered in partnership with the County Council as Waste Disposal Authority
 - f) The workflow and processes for managing fly-tipping between NCSL, Biffa and the council are reviewed and streamlined to improve efficiency and effectiveness

- g) The charging structure for the Bulky Uplift service is reviewed to make accessing the service easier for residents on low incomes and Universal Credit
- h) The service considers the use of an app for reporting fly-tipping
- i) The manner in which the council records and analyses Environmental Anti-Social Behaviour is reviewed
- j) The service continues to review best practice elsewhere
- k) That the Council reviews current enforcement arrangements to ensure that the full range of sanctions available to the council are used more effectively
- l) To ask officers to work with partners and local businesses on dealing with waste that arises from their products or services being used and promoting any existing services
- m) To ensure that any actions and reviews arising from the task and finish group have a clear timeline for implementation so that they can be monitored and followed up on
- n) Ask the leader of the council to write to the leader of Norfolk County Council to ask the county council to:
 - o) Reverse charges on DIY waste at recycling centres.
 - p) Provide funding for lower income residents of Norwich city centre to deal with their bulky waste

20. Cabinet considered these recommendations at its November 2022 meeting and all were adopted with an additional recommendation to agree a timeline to be set to an action plan with Key Performance Indicators being considered at the annual refresh of the corporate plan agreed.

County Lines drug dealing, drug addiction and vulnerable women and girls

- 21. The scrutiny committee meeting in October 2022 looked at “County Lines drug dealing, drug addiction and vulnerable women and girls”. The agenda and the minutes of the meeting can be found [here](#).
- 22. The committee considered County Line gangs activity within the city and asked questions of the police authority to gain insight of its impact upon the city and its residents. The council’s acting community safety manager attended to answer member questions too.
- 23. A robust debate was held and committee asked for an update on recommendations made to cabinet from its meeting held in September 2018 in relation to County Lines.

Debt advice and support services

24. At its November 2022 meeting the committee considered “debt advice and support services”. The agenda and minutes of the meeting can be found [here](#).
25. The committee examined the extent to which debt advice and support services provided by the council and its partners were helping to prevent people from falling into debt and becoming subject to debt recovery.
26. Members received a report from the senior financial inclusion officer and a presentation from the head of strategy, engagement and culture. Service updates and case study examples were received from the head of revenues and benefits, the interim tenancy services and income manager and the income and rents manager and members had an opportunity to ask questions of officers.
27. Committee considered recommendations to make to cabinet at its following meeting in December 2022 and resolved to agree the following;
 - a) That the council maintains a 100% Council Tax reduction scheme;
 - b) That the council maintain its financial support of the Financial Inclusion Consortium;
 - c) That cabinet lobbies against the punitive elements of the benefit system such as the recovery of overpayments and the Spare Room Subsidy;
 - d) That the council campaigns to encourage everyone to claim what benefits they are entitled to;
 - e) That officers circulate a list to councillors of any additional subsidiary advice agencies that could assist residents;
 - f) That council tax and housing benefit letters when revised are brought to scrutiny committee to be reviewed and that partners such as the tenant improvement panel, leaseholder group, Citizens Advice Bureau and Norfolk Community Law Service are consulted on changes;
 - g) If collected, that information as to why households fall into debt is provided; and
 - h) Illustrate how many people access debt information and by what means; in person, online or by telephone.
28. Cabinet considered these recommendations at its January 2023 meeting and resolved to agree them all, with the first two subject to the budget being resolved by full council in February 2023.

Financing for renewable energy/energy efficiency

29. At its January 2023 meeting the committee looked at the topic of “Financing for renewable energy/ energy efficiency”. The reports and minutes of the meeting can be found [here](#).
30. The committee considered options for green financing to support the council to achieve its target of carbon neutrality by 2030.
31. Members considered information from UK100 and received a presentation from the [Green Finance Institute](#) (GFI).
32. The environmental strategy manager advised that a report was to be considered at the Climate and Environment Emergency Executive Panel (CEEEP) on 14 February 2023 in relation to the item, agenda and minutes [here](#). Members agreed to consider any relevant recommendations to cabinet after this meeting.
33. The committee at its March 2023 meeting made the following recommendations:

Local Climate Bonds

- a) To begin piloting blended finance models and identify a project to invest in, potentially the retrofitting of community centers.

Green Mortgage Campaign

- b) To seek further analysis of green mortgage providers and to understand how Norwich City Council can be a part of this and seek opportunities to work with partner providers, such as Lendology.

Integrated retrofit finance:

- c) To obtain statistics regarding take up rate from the pilot in Manchester, with a view to promoting such a campaign in Norwich and gather information on how the projects were delivered,
- d) See if the additional benefits data was available; and
- e) Explore working with partners, such as the Greater Norwich Growth Board to expand this work within the Greater Norwich area.

Green rental agreements:

- f) To seek clarity on how green rental models work in practice, how these protect tenants and how tenants can be involved in the process, with LetNCC being considered as a pilot model.

Property link finance:

- g) To support the concept of property link finance and seek to be considered for a UK pilot or early adoption, whichever comes first.

General recommendations:

- h) To increase capacity for the delivery of green finance projects and seek assurance from cabinet that the council has the resources for these.
 - i) To investigate how Norwich City Council can benefit as a landlord from these projects
 - j) Investigate how the council's wholly owned companies, NCSL and NRL can be part of the retrofit programme
 - k) To ask cabinet to provide the scrutiny committee with details of the work already underway on whole house retrofit pilots, including details of funding.
34. Cabinet discussed the recommendations at its meeting on 14 June 2023. Committee resolved as proposed by Councillor Hampton, cabinet member for climate change that the recommendations be referred to the Climate and Environment Emergency Executive Committee to be considered as part of their work programme.

Welcoming refugees and asylum seekers into Norwich and overcoming obstacles to their smooth integration

35. Members considered the scope of the above item at their meeting on 13 October 2022 and discussed how best to include the views of refugees and asylum seekers. It was agreed that a survey would be conducted with partner agencies and a visit undertaken to a community café accessed by refugees and asylum seekers.
36. Members undertook a visit to the Zainab café, an organisation which supports refugees and asylum to access work experience. Councillors spoke with individuals and the feedback from this visit and the survey conducted with partner agencies was presented at the scrutiny committee meeting held on 16 March 2023, reports and minutes can be found [here](#).
37. Members considered a number of recommendations on this item and agreed the following recommendations for officers to address which were reported to cabinet at its meeting on 14 June 2023.
- a) Investigate with partner organisations, and decide upon, a method of approach that is acceptable to asylum seekers and refugees, that allows the committee to gain data directly from service users so that the committee can understand the level of need within the city.
 - b) Ask the Head of legal and procurement to ask relevant managers to ensure that all customer contact assistants were aware of the Intran translation service and that the availability of the service was advertised.
 - c) Ask officers if any data sets around refugees and asylum seekers were already available

- d) Ask officers to investigate if there were any council owned properties that the Zainab Project could use as a base; and
- e) Review the list of issues raised by service users at the Zainab Café and ask for an update to be brought to a meeting of the scrutiny committee early in the civic year.

Call-in

- 38. Scrutiny committee monitors the decisions of the Cabinet. It can 'call-in' certain decisions that have been made by the Cabinet but not yet implemented. This enables it to consider whether the decision is appropriate. The Scrutiny Committee may recommend that Cabinet reconsiders the decision. The Scrutiny Committee may also be consulted by Cabinet or the Council on forthcoming decisions and the development of policy.
- 39. There were no call-ins this civic year.

Recurring items

- 40. There are number of items that are recurring and standing items for the committee. Each year the committee look at the annual budget, the corporate plan, the equality report and the business plans of the wholly owned companies of the council, Norwich Regeneration Limited (NRL) and Norwich City Services Limited (NCSL). At each meeting the committee considers its work programme and hears updates from the representatives appointed to the Norfolk Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (NHOSC) and the Norfolk Countywide Community Safety Partnership Scrutiny Sub Panel (NCCSPSSP).

Tracker

- 41. Members requested that officers design a tracker to plot the outcome of recommendations to the committee. This has been developed and will be considered as part of the work programme item at every meeting.

Budget

- 42. The scrutiny committee pre-scrutinise the budget every year in early February before the budget papers are presented to cabinet. The meeting for the 2022-23 civic year was held on 2 February 2023. The report and minutes of the meeting can be found [here](#).
- 43. During the meeting members asked questions on each section of the report: local government finance, the general fund, the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) business plan and budget, the capital and commercial investment strategy and the Treasury Management Strategy. Members praised officers for their work and recognised the robust financial management which had achieved a balanced budget.
- 44. Members made some suggestions which were noted for consideration by the interim Section 151 Officer. A member raised a concern regarding

the use of electronic advertising hoardings on council land. Members wanted to see the cost implications of the council's net zero carbon aspirations represented in the budget, how would this be funded and what external sources of funding could be leveraged. Members discussed the increase of 7% in the council's housing rents, with some members concerned that this would affect the most vulnerable. Members discussed updates to council housing stock in terms of bathrooms and kitchens and adopting a whole house approach to works including retrofitting. Members discussed the council's proposed capital investments which relate to the corporate plan objectives and asked if a strand on carbon reduction and biodiversity could be added. Members discussed Treasury Management and a member raised a concern regarding the council's bank and its lack of ethical credentials.

45. Members made the following recommendation to cabinet which was considered at the cabinet meeting held on 8 February 2023 and agreed:
 - a) pilot a whole house approach to decarbonisation of our council homes. Use data, information and practice gathered from the pilot, alongside stock condition data and thermography surveys to support the development of the Housing Revenue Account Decarbonisation Plan.

Corporate Plan

46. The scrutiny committee looks at the council's Corporate Plan and any refreshes made throughout the corporate plan's life cycle. The current Corporate Plan 2022-26 was not reviewed this civic year.

Equality report

47. At its meeting on 19 January 2023 the scrutiny committee considered the Equality Information Report 2023. This document is a statutory document that the council must publish by 31 January each year. The report and minutes of the meeting can be found [here](#).
48. Members thanked officers for their work and discussion centred on the following key points. Trend based reporting, could the next Equality Information Report include in order that year on year comparisons be made. Could the social economic background of employees be plotted. Members discussed contextual recruitment where lived experience was given weight rather than qualifications. The head of HR and organisational development advised that in terms of practices which excluded people without formal qualifications, work was ongoing and when service reviews were conducted job descriptions were reviewed to see if all aspects were required. Reducing Inequality Target Areas (RITAs), members asked how success was measured and asked for a report providing data detailing the objectives of the RITAs and the progress made to meeting them. Customer flags indicating vulnerability, members were reassured that information was shared with the council's contractors and asked if a strand could be included in the next Equality Information report on flags and what they denoted in terms of equalities data.

49. Cabinet discussed scrutiny committee's considerations at its meeting held 8 February 2023. There were no specific recommendations to consider.

Business plans

50. Each year the scrutiny committee considers the business plans of the council's wholly owned companies; NCSL and NRL. The business plan for NCSL was not available this year to consider.
51. The NRL business plan was considered in private by members as it was exempt under paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 at its meeting held on 8 December 2022. The above the line minutes of the meeting can be found [here](#).
52. The following recommendation was considered and agreed by cabinet at its meeting held on 14 January 2023.
- a) To both grow, deliver and to mitigate overexposure to commercial risk from one sector, cabinet will support more detailed work on the part of NRL to spread risk and build resilience further into the business, by committing to its scoping in detail the business case for projects like energy saving pilots and skills building for young people.

Work programme setting

53. The scrutiny committee work programme is key for the committee as it outlines the topics that the committee will discuss throughout the civic year. Usually, the committee will consider the work programme for the year at the first meeting of the civic year and any amendments are made as part of the standing work programme item on each agenda.
54. For the civic year 2022-23 the committee held an informal meeting to consider its work programme in May 2022.
55. Members are asked to circulate TOPIC forms in advance of the meeting. The TOPIC forms ask members to identify the scope of the item by looking at the following:
- a) **Time:** Is this the right time to review the issue?
 - b) **Objective:** What would be the objective of scrutiny? How do you feel scrutiny could make a difference
 - c) **Performance:** Can performance be improved by scrutiny input?
 - d) **Public Interest:** What would be the public interest in placing this topic onto the work programme?
 - e) **Contribution:** How would a scrutiny review contribute to achieving our corporate aims?

56. Throughout the civic year members updated the work programme, either by changing the substantive item discussed or by refining the scope of the item.

Updates from joint scrutiny committees

57. Norwich City Council has a representative, and named substitute, on two scrutiny committees that are held by Norfolk County Council. These are Norfolk Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (NHOSC) and the Norfolk Countywide Community Safety Partnership Scrutiny Sub Panel (NCCSPSSP).
58. The role of NHOSC is to look at the work of the clinical commissioning groups and National Health Service (NHS) trusts and the local area team of NHS England. It acts as a 'critical friend' by suggesting ways that health related services might be improved. It also looks at the way the health service interacts with social care services, the voluntary sector, independent providers and other county council services to jointly provide better health services to meet the diverse needs of Norfolk residents and improve their well-being. NHOSC meets every other month and the reports and minutes of each meeting are available [here](#).
59. Reports from NHOSC were presented at the next possible meeting of the scrutiny committee, these were either oral reports or a written report was circulated to members and then questions were asked of the representative.
60. The representative for the 2022-23 civic year was Councillor Brociek-Coulton.
61. The role of the Norfolk Countywide Community Safety Partnership Scrutiny Sub Panel is to:
- a) Scrutinise the actions, decisions and priorities of the Norfolk Countywide Community Safety Crime and Disorder Partnership in respect of crime and disorder on behalf of the (County) community services overview and scrutiny panel
 - b) Scrutinise the priorities as set out in the annual countywide community safety partnership plan
 - c) Make any reports or recommendations to the countywide community safety partnership.
62. While the scrutiny sub panel has the duty of scrutinising the work of the Norfolk countywide community safety partnership the police and crime panel scrutinises the work of the police and crime commissioner. There is a protocol regarding the relationship of these two panels to encourage and exchange information and to co-operate towards the delivery of their respective responsibilities. The community safety partnership meets on a half yearly basis. The reports and minutes of NCCSPSSP can be found [here](#).
63. The representative for the council was Councillor Thomas (Vi).

Training

64. The committee took part in a training session held remotely on 30 June 2022 by Dave McKenna. The aim of the session was to build on existing good practice and help councillors think about how meetings might be more effective.

Peer review

65. The council took part in a Local Government Association Peer Challenge, in January 2023. These are an established tool to support councils to drive improvements and efficiency in specific service areas as well as at a corporate level.
66. The findings of the review were very positive and were presented to cabinet in [March 2023](#).
67. The peer team made a number of suggestions in relation to scrutiny committee after speaking with officers and members. Feedback from officers highlighted by the review is that they would like a greater focus on operational matters.
68. The peers suggested that how the forward plan for committee was developed be reviewed to influence a more joined up approach. The work programme for the civic year 2023/24 has been developed in consultation with senior officers.
69. Peers also strongly suggested that more formal officer support should be invested in to support and raise the profile of the committee.

Public involvement and getting in touch with scrutiny

70. Meetings of the scrutiny committee are usually as informal as possible and as well as scrutiny members, are attended by cabinet portfolio members, officers, partners and anyone else who can assist with the work and provide evidence for reviews.
71. Members of the public are also welcomed to attend the scrutiny committee meetings and can participate at the discretion of the committee's chair. If you do wish to participate regarding an agenda item at a scrutiny meeting, you are requested to contact democratic services who will liaise with the chair of the committee. To contact democratic services please use democraticservices@norwich.gov.uk.
72. Members of the public can suggest a topic for scrutiny by submitting an on-line form available on the council's website. Please encourage your constituents to suggest topics in this way.

Motion to: Council

Item 9A

26 September 2023

Subject: Norwich Bus Fares

Proposer: Councillor Stonard

Seconded: Councillor Hampton

This council recognises the vital importance of affordable, reliable, and high-quality public transport to the functioning of Norwich. We therefore strongly welcome the recent IPPR research on public transport, published on 6 October 2022 under the title “To support low-income households, it's time to reduce the cost of daily bus travel”. While the report makes clear that reducing fares is not the only issue needed to increase bus patronage – interventions to improve speed, reliability and the experience of passengers are all required as well - reductions in the costs of public transport for passengers are essential for a fair transport system.

Council **RESOLVES** to

- 1) note that; -
 - a) Low-income households are the most likely to use buses, while research by the RAC Foundation shows that since 2013 the cost of bus travel has risen by a greater extent than all other forms of transport. It is the poorest households, without access to other forms of travel, that have borne the brunt of these increases driven by de-regulation and lack of long-term funding.
 - b) Any reduction in bus fares would therefore be of the greatest benefit to those least well off. Capping bus fares at no more than £1 per day would save the poorest 20% of households in England £0.8bn a year. Making all bus fares in England free would save the poorest 40% of households £1.5bn a year.
 - c) This Council notes that a policy of making bus fares in England entirely free would cost £2.3bn a year, with the greatest benefits going to the least well off. For comparison, the recent ‘fiscal event’ in September 2022 proposed £40bn worth of tax cuts, mostly to the most well off. The current proposed Government funding for new roads is £27bn, for schemes that are likely to increase pollution and make the climate and biodiversity crises worse. For the same money, bus travel could be made free for at least ten years, helping to reduce car journeys, and making progress towards a net zero transport system.

- 2) ask that the Leader of the Council writes to the Secretary of State for Transport, the Shadow Secretary State for Transport, Norwich's two MPs and to the Leader of the county council expressing this Council's support for making public transport in Norwich free of charge; and
- 3) Use its existing partnerships and relationships with the county council and bus operators, to work to promote this objective.

Motion to: Council

Item 9B

26 September 2023

Subject: Working four days a week

Proposer: Councillor Worley

Seconder: Councillor Galvin

Several UK-based campaigns, including the campaign of the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, call for flexible working arrangements to be a day-one right for all employees and that job adverts should stipulate this flexibility. Flexible working arrangements benefit different groups of people, including parents, carers, people who want to study, and people who volunteer in their community. They also support mental and physical health. Trials where employees have worked a four-day week have led to better retention which has saved expense in agency fees.

Growing evidence, including a trial of 2500 government employees in Iceland who switched to a reduced (four-day) working week for a period of 4 years suggests that productivity stays the same or improves when working hours are reduced. The Iceland trial found that the well-being of employees also increased dramatically.

Council **RESOLVES** to:

- 1) continue to provide exemplar practices regarding flexible working arrangements throughout the different levels of the organisation, including stipulating flexibility in job adverts
- 2) extend its longstanding work with partners on the living wage to support flexible working; and
- 3) explore the benefits of a reduced working week at full pay and initiate discussions within the council and with partners about the potential of this future model.

Motion to: Council

Item 9C

26 September 2023

Subject: Motion for the Ocean

Proposer: Councillor Champion

Seconded: Councillor Francis

Norfolk's wildlife, habitats and ecosystems are vitally important to us and future generations, enhancing our lives, from the insects that pollinate our food crops to our residents' health and wellbeing. The important economic benefits that all of Norfolk's interconnected waterways bring to local communities via recreational use and through tourism, are at risk of being lost.

Norwich City is at the heart of a significant geographical area of ecological importance, the majority of which is built up of designated Sites of Special Scientific Interest, and therefore has a direct impact on the sustainability of this environment, other councils downstream and on the Norfolk coast. A similar Motion for the Ocean has been adopted by other councils nationally, both coastal and inland, highlighting the interconnectivity of our waterways.

Recognising the critical importance of biodiversity, and the urgent need to address its decline, makes it imperative that we declare our commitment to conserving and restoring biodiversity within Norwich. The Government's Environment Bill has required a Local Nature Recovery Strategy and Nature Recovery Network and Norwich City Council will need to play its part.

Having adopted a Biodiversity Emergency Declaration, we need to demonstrate our commitment to protecting and enhancing biodiversity within our jurisdiction and setting a precedent for outside partners and businesses. One of the key themes of the current Corporate Plan, is to deliver on the environment. This motion would enable and augment our existing Wensum Strategy by giving clear targets towards the objectives stated in the strategy vision, such as 'enhancing the natural environment, including water quality, biodiversity, and green infrastructure'.

As a Council that has adopted a Biodiversity Emergency Declaration, we must therefore pledge to incorporate collaborative environmental governance, to recognise the interconnected human and biological systems, and build collaboration between actors across multiple scales.

We recognise the harm to the coastal ecosystem caused by the dumping of sewage in our sea, effluent from rivers and that ocean recovery is a key part of our commitment to tackling climate change and ensuring our waters are a safe place for local people to enjoy.

Council **RESOLVES** to:

1) Ask cabinet to consider:

- a) Production of a report to Cabinet within twelve months on the implementation of possible actions and projects that would improve local waterways, such as the 'floating vegetation platforms' planned in the Wensum Strategy. This report would need to reflect the impact that decisions about water quality in Norwich City have on sea water quality and therefore lead to ocean recovery in Norfolk and its coastal communities.
- b) Embedding the recovery of waterways connected to Norwich City in all strategic decisions, plans, budgets, procurement and decisions by establishing clearer links between this and Norwich's Biodiversity Strategy and our Climate Change commitments.
- c) Within 12 months, give evidence of the work with partners locally to deliver increased environmental sustainability in industries that have a direct impact on the waterways that radiate out from Norwich City. This would ensure a sustainable and equitable 'blue economy' for our Norfolk neighbours, that delivers ocean recovery and local prosperity, including the local tourist industry.
- d) Revised planning guidance and swift enforcement powers that ensure new development doesn't jeopardise our waterways and oceans. In accordance with our Corporate Plan, we need work closely with others, such as the Environment Agency, the Broads Authority, the Norfolk Wildlife Trust, Anglian Water, and with neighbouring districts, to embed strong links with The Biodiversity Strategy.
- e) Growing 'ecological literacy' by ensuring all pupils are given the opportunity to have educational experience of our complex network of wetlands and waterways and the impact humans have on their journey to the ocean. All residents should have first-hand experience of, and equitable access to, these natural habitats through physical experiences that promote their preservation.
- f) Creating an online portal on the Council website to update residents on water quality, enabling them to make informed decisions based on updated information, before they use local sites for water-based activities, such as swimming. This portal could also allow residents to report sites of hazardous waste; and
- g) Apply for areas already popularly used by river swimmers to be designated bathing waters.

2) Write to the Government asking it to:

- a) Stop plastic pollution at source - strengthening the regulations around single-use plastics and set standards for microfibre-catching filters to ensure that all new domestic and commercial washing machines are fitted with a filter that captures a high percentage of microfibres produced in the wash cycle.
- b) Increasing the financial penalties on water companies found to be dumping sewage into our sea and setting legally binding targets for them to substantially reduce the use of combined sewage overflows (CSOs) in future.
- c) Increase funding to the Environment Agency to carry out enforcement of these higher penalties.
- d) Ensure the burden of any new investment in infrastructure is carried by shareholders first and to prevent the senior management of water companies found to have broken the law from serving elsewhere in the industry.
- e) Appoint a dedicated Minister for Coastal Communities, utilize marine and social scientific advice to update the Marine Policy Statement and produce a national Ocean Recovery Strategy which will enable the recovery of marine ecosystems, rather than managing degraded or altered habitats in their reduced state.

Glossary

- A 'blue economy' is one which uses ocean resources sustainably, whilst improving community wellbeing and social equity.
- 'Ecological literacy' is the ability to understand the natural systems that make life on Earth possible.

Motion to: Council

Item 9D

26 September 2023

Subject: Protecting Private Renters

Proposer: Councillor Beth Jones

Seconder: Councillor Kendrick

The power of the private rented sector in Norwich has grown significantly over the last 30 years as home ownership has declined and social housing has been reduced. About 25% of all Norwich's homes are now privately rented. Whilst private renters pay a higher proportion of their income in rent than either mortgage payers or social housing tenants, the conditions they live in are more likely to be unsafe. The English Housing Survey – Private Rented Sector 2020 found that in the private rented sector the rate of category one hazards is 13%, these are a serious and immediate risk to a person's health and safety, compared to 9% in owner occupied or 5% in social housing and private rented are the tenure most likely to fail the Decent Homes Standard.

Council **RESOLVES** to :

- 1) Acknowledge and thank the work of the private sector housing team in tackling absentee landlords within the city, more recently at St Peter's House this year.
- 2) Ask cabinet to;
 - a) Consider the feasibility of a stock condition survey of Houses of Multiple Occupation to provide an evidence base from which to best understand and respond to it.
 - b) Consider the evidence base recently commissioned on Houses of Multiple Occupation distribution in the city and consider planning and/or regulatory powers which can be utilized to better secure improved housing standards.
 - c) Move to extending the use of regulatory and other relevant statutory powers, in particular additional and selective licensing across all private rented homes as indicated by the evidence base, that will assist in better protecting tenants, drive up standards in the sector and crack down on rogue landlords.

Motion to: Council

Item 9E

26 September 2023

Subject: Addressing the Issue of 'Box Shifting' for Fair and Effective Business Rates Collection

Proposer: Councillor Stonard

Seconder: Councillor Kendrick

The practice of "box shifting," a practice where landlords place boxes in vacant commercial properties for a six-week period to trigger a rates-free period, costs councils around £250 million annually (Local Government Association Survey, 2019). This cycle, often repeated, results in local councils losing over two-thirds of their empty rates incomes and that some landlords use basic objects such as a broadband box or an empty fish tank to initiate rates avoidance, which exacerbates the loss of income for councils.

Council **RESOLVES** to:

1) Note that this practice undermines the integrity of our rates system and deprives the local community of funds that could be invested in local services and infrastructure, that current legislation inadvertently facilitates these practices, and reform is needed to ensure that rates accurately reflect property usage and occupancy.

2) Ask the Leader to write to government to:

- a) Ask for the extension of the occupation period for rates exemption from six weeks to six months, following the example of the Welsh and Scottish governments, which have already introduced legislation to tackle this issue; and
- b) Advocate for robust and regular checks on the occupancy status of commercial properties to ensure compliance with any reformed rates system.

