

Cabinet

17:30 to 18:50

Wednesday, 15 January 2025

Present: Councillors Hampton (Vice-Chair in the Chair, Jones, Kendrick and Kidman)

Apologies: Councillors Stonard (Chair), Giles and Packer

In attendance: Councillor Calvert (Green Group representative)
Councillor Wright (Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group)

1. Declarations of Interest

The Monitoring Officer confirmed that all Members had been issued a general dispensation for papers related to the budget.

2. Public Questions and Petitions

There had been no public questions or petitions received.

3. Questions to Cabinet Members

There had been no questions received.

4. Minutes

RESOLVED to approve the accuracy of the minutes of the meeting held on 11 December 2024.

5. Update on Motion: Protecting Private Renters

The Cabinet Member for Housing provided a verbal update on Motion: Protecting Private Renters. This was following the motion agreed at Full Council on 26 September 2023 and the motion from Councillor Catt, Motion: Private rented housing, agreed at Full Council on 28 November 2023. Since the motions had passed significant work had been completed. As part of the previous year's budget setting process a study on the prevalence of Housing in Multiple Occupancy (HMOs) in Norwich had been agreed. This study had now been completed and a further budget growth bid was being considered for the financial year 2025/26 to enable a stock condition survey of HMOS. This would enable the Council to understand what regulatory routes could be used in the future. The number of private renting had increased significantly year on year. She highlighted that a higher proportion of

private rented properties had Category 1 Hazards in comparison to owner-occupied and social housing properties. The evidence already gathered was able to inform policies on the spread of HMOs around the city. The stock condition survey would be able to provide more information to improve standards within the city. Having a strong evidence base would enable the Council to create policies that could stand up to challenge. The Council remained committed to the appropriate regulatory powers to raise standards. Residents should feel safe to escalate their concerns to the Council. Further updates would be brought to Cabinet.

RESOLVED, to note the update.

6. Draft Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Action Plan 2024-27

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for A Climate Responsive Norwich presented the report. She highlighted that it had been subject to a lengthy discussion at Scrutiny Committee.

Councillor Wright, the Chair of the Scrutiny Committee, presented the Scrutiny Committee recommendations. He highlighted that there had been a significant discussion at the Scrutiny Committee meeting and thanked Cabinet for considering the recommendations.

Councillor Calvert asked the following question on behalf of the Green Group:

“Thank you for all the work on the action plan, and for the mostly positive response to scrutiny recommendations. Regarding the scrutiny recommendation to look into a four day working week, which is proven to increase staff satisfaction and productivity, following a question to cabinet in July 24, Cllr Kendrick said “we will consider all options for flexible working, (including a four-day working week) considering the needs of our residents and workforce. We will continue to monitor the Government’s legislative agenda” The government has dropped the previous Tory government’s concerns. Can you reassure us that due consideration is going to be given to this option?”

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for A Climate Responsive Norwich gave the following response:

“The response to the Scrutiny recommendation made in relation to the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan and specifically the 4 day working week is included in the Cabinet papers on page 77.

This is the current position, and I don’t have anything further to add on the matter at this point. Cabinet will of course be updated on any future developments.”

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for A Climate Responsive Norwich moved, and the Cabinet Member for Housing seconded the recommendations as set out in the report.

RESOLVED, unanimously, to:

- 1) Consider the recommendations made by the Scrutiny Committee at their meeting on the 12 December 2024 as per Appendix 2 and confirm its agreement to accept or reject these for the reasons cited
- 2) Approve the draft Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Action Plan – 2024-2027

7. Norwich City Council – Equality Information Report 2025

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for A Climate Responsive Norwich presented the report. The layout of the report had been adapted to reflect the new objectives as per the Equality Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Strategy 2024-27. There had been no significant changes since the Equality Information Report 2024. Some successes of the year included the first Employee Network being established, the Council's support of the establishment of the Inclusive Norwich Partnership and the Council was working with Age UK to achieve the aims of the city becoming an Age Friendly city.

The Cabinet Member for Housing commented that the report provided useful information on how the Council was responding to challenges faced by residents.

Councillor Calvert asked the following question on behalf of the Green Group: "Thank you for this important report and all the work that has gone into it. At scrutiny we asked for a more in depth evaluation of Go For Less cards, and we can see that over half are going to over 60s, 25% to low income households, around 15% to children but just 3% to post 16 students (just 25 in the city), who we know are often in need of the services supplied. Can you give tell us a bit more about what is being done to make sure the benefit is widened to include this important group?"

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for A Climate Responsive Norwich provided the following response: "Officers are working to launch a fully digitised version of the Go4Less card which will ensure the card is accessible to more people. This will be accompanied by a communications plan which will identify target users and how best to raise awareness of the card.

Many post-16 students are able to access reduced rates and discounted memberships for sport and leisure activities across the city, including at the UEA Sportspark, Riverside Leisure Centre and at local budget gyms. Student discounts also apply to many cultural events and tickets.

It is therefore suggested that low uptake amongst this user group may, in part, be because of the plethora of discounted options available to them."

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for A Climate Responsive Norwich moved, and the Cabinet Member for A Prosperous Norwich seconded the recommendations as set out in the report.

RESOLVED, unanimously, to:

- 1) Approve the recommendation made by the Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 12 December 2024 and the actions proposed to meet it
- 2) Approve the Equality Information Report 2025 for publication.

8. Norwich Inclusive Economy Vision – Key Decision

The Cabinet Member for A Prosperous Norwich introduced the report. Norwich had a long industrial heritage, including being the place of manufacturing of mustard. The transition to a service-led economy had taken place early in Norwich. Several institutions were based in Norwich providing services, such as the two universities, financial services and the

research park to the west of the city. Norwich had been the first UNESCO City of Literature in the UK and hosted a wide range of cultural institutions and parks and open space. The Inclusive Economy Vision detailed how the economy would address the social, economic and environmental inequalities within the city and had an extensive evidence base. The vision had been subject to engagement with neighbouring authorities and the County Council. It detailed how sectors would need to work together to achieve the long term ambitions for the city. Following the adoption of the vision five-year strategies would be produced to provide the action plans how to address the long-term aims within the Inclusive Economy Vision. Through a strong message in the vision, it would enable the Council to ask the Government and private sector for funding for a variety of projects.

Councillor Calvert asked the following question on behalf of the Green Group: “The evidence base makes clear that Norwich is already trailing behind many of its statistical comparators including Cambridge, Ipswich and Peterborough across a number of key metrics including employment change, GVA growth, loss of office and industrial floor space. Interventions are urgently needed that prevent Norwich becoming a 'left behind city'. Many of the challenges facing the city have become engrained and have not changed over the last decade. Yet during this time the cabinet have always assured us that enough is being done to grow the city’s economy. How can we be fully assured that this time things will change and that the council will work proactively and allocate resource to work with partners like the Chambers of Commerce and BID to drive change and actually deliver the strategy?”

The Cabinet Member for A Prosperous Norwich asked the Interim Executive Director of Major Projects to respond to the question. He highlighted that the reason that the decline in the city centre was due in part due to factors outside the City Council’s control and boundaries as there were several large economic clusters outside the boundary. The evidence base provided a good foundation for developing strategies moving forward based on the ambitions within the Norwich Inclusive Economy Vision. Having a clear strategy and understanding of the challenges that the city faced would enable funding bids to help address the challenges.

In response to Councillor Calvert’s supplementary question the Cabinet Member for A Prosperous Norwich highlighted that work had been undertaken to address challenges that the city faces but the Inclusive Economy Vision articulated a reimagined vision for the future in line with the City Vision 2040. The Interim Executive Director of Major Projects assured members that the City Council had been successful in securing funding for the city which included the Towns Deal funding awarded by the previous Government.

The Cabinet Member for A Prosperous Norwich moved, and the Cabinet Member for An Open and Modern Council seconded the recommendations as set out in the report.

RESOLVED, unanimously, to approve and adopt the Norwich Inclusive Economy Vision.

9. The Council’s provisional 2025-26 budget and medium term financial strategy

The Cabinet Member for An Open and Modern Council presented the report. The report detailed the budget proposals for 2025/26 which had been following a challenging but vigorous process which included the inherent challenges in local government finance. The Council had continued its prudent financial management which meant that the City Council was in a better position than other local authorities. The Government would be reviewing

the way in which local authorities were funded including the provision of multi-year settlements. Other changes would emerge through the Government's programme of devolution and local government reorganisation. The report covers a number of elements, including the General Fund, Housing Revenue Account (HRA), capital programmes and treasury management activities. The budget proposals protected service delivery, statutory duties and support the development of services. The General Fund remained challenging due to the pressures of inflation. The budget included an assumption that Council Tax would be increased by the maximum allowed without a referendum. The Council continued to maintain strong reserves, and any suggested drawdown of reserves was from earmarked funds. The report also detailed the HRA budget following the agreement of HRA Business Plan in December 2024. This included a proposed increase in social rent of Consumer Price Index (CPI) + 1%. The anticipated underspend within the HRA would be moved into reserves to fund the building of new social housing and improvements to existing stock, including additional funding to deal with damp and mould. The Treasury Management Strategy had been considered by the Treasury Management Committee in January. The Committee provided crucial information and governance of the Council's Treasury Management activities. The Council's borrowing was within appropriate levels and the minimum revenue provision. The strategy ensured that the return from investments could be used to fund service delivery. The report included the statutory statement by the Council's s151 officer on the risks of any detailed proposals and the Council must give regard to the statement.

The Cabinet Member for Housing commented on the proposed HRA budget and highlighted the impact of the previous imposed rent reduction had had on the HRA budget. In order to maintain the HRA rents would need to be increased. The proposed rent increase had been subject to consultation with the tenant involvement panel. Investment in the Council's stock was required as the quality of homes impacted on residents' lives and wellbeing. The budget would also enable the Council to respond to the results of the stock condition survey and to address the challenges of decarbonisation. Increased regulatory pressures were welcomed but did have additional costs associated with them. The social rents would continue to be below the Local Housing Allowance to ensure that residents could pay their rent.

Councillor Calvert asked the following question on behalf of the Green Group: "Transfer of 'Citizen' magazine to online only looks set to save £20,000 per year. Could you explain and share the background here - what work has been done as to justify this cut, if we explored how if for example advertising could have kept a guaranteed paper copy through every door: most of all have we checked the equalities impacts - how will we ensure meeting our communications objectives, when we know that those without digital access are most likely to be people aged over 65, or households with low income or financial vulnerability?"

The Cabinet Member for An Open and Modern Council gave the following response: "The budget for the communications team, as with different budgets throughout the council, has come under increasing pressure in recent years because of the pressing need to identify year-on-year savings to ensure the council can continue to set a balanced budget.

The money set aside for producing Citizen magazine was significantly impacted by the Covid pandemic and other global factors which resulted in steep rises in paper costs and distribution fees.

These costs have remained at the same elevated level compared to pre-pandemic costs. Consequently, after 2021, it was not possible to produce the same number of issues of the magazine (four per year) without increasing the spend on Citizen.

To keep within budget, the number of issues reduced from four to three in the 2022-23 financial year. Due to ongoing budget savings in 2023-24, the number of issues had to reduce further from three to two in both that financial year and this financial year (2024-25).

In order to make further budget savings in 2025-26, a £20,000 reduction in Citizen spend has been put forward. All options for future editions are being explored. The summary nature of this report means that detail about this saving is limited and online is one option that will be explored, but not the only option.”

In response to Councillor Calvert’s supplementary question the Executive Director of Communities and Housing confirmed that all options in relation to Citizen magazine would be considered, including the timing of publications.

The Cabinet Member for An Open and Modern Council moved, and the Cabinet Member for Housing seconded the recommendations as set out in the report.

RESOLVED, unanimously, to:

- 1) Note the latest financial information, the budget strategy incorporated into the report and the budget proposals, which enable the Council to set a balanced budget for 2025-2026 and the Medium-Term Financial Strategy for the period 2029-2030.
- 2) Note the Section 25 report of the chief finance officer on the robustness of the budget estimates, the adequacy of reserve and the key financial risks to the council.
- 3) Note that the Council Tax resolution for 2025/26, prepared in accordance with Sections 32-36 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, amended by the Localism Act 2011, will be calculated and presented to Council for approval once Norfolk County Council and the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner for Norfolk have agreed the precepts for the next financial year.

10. Norwich Provisions Market Strategic Outline Case – Key Decision

The Cabinet Member for A Prosperous Norwich presented the report. Norwich Market was one of the oldest and largest outdoor markets in the country and was deeply intertwined with the history of the city. It was a vibrant hub and a key component of the city’s identity and economic hub. There was a strong case to address issues that prevented the Market from reaching its full potential such as environmental and operational challenges. The Council would invest in infrastructure, digital offering and marketing of Norwich Market. The Strategic Outline Case had been developed to assess and guide the next phase of the project, and a wide range of options had been considered. Stakeholder engagement would take place, including with Market Traders to build more detailed options for the Outline Business Case.

Councillor Calvert asked the following question on behalf of the Green Group: “The market is acknowledged as a jewel in the crown of Norwich, where small traders and businesses,

both long established and new, work hard year-round through winter cold and summer heat to enliven our city centre. A revamp which addresses longstanding problems for traders as well as enabling evening and weekend trade, carbon- and waste-friendly operations and a refresh is long overdue and exciting. The report recommends spending three quarters of a million pounds from reserves as a first step to provide a detailed report and some 'quick wins'. Rightly, traders have been consulted but users so far have not: how can we be assured of co-creation, customer input and value for council tax payers and that the management team be supported with resource going forward?"

The Cabinet Member for A Prosperous Norwich gave the following response: "The project has been informed by extensive evidence as well as trader and wider stakeholder engagement. A public survey was conducted in 2022 where 1400¹ members of the public were surveyed in person, and this included users and non-users of the market. This evidential data was fed into the project from the very beginning.

The next stage of the project focuses on engagement with the public and key target groups to further refine and validate the findings, with the aim of identifying a preferred option for the Provisions Market. That preferred option will be supported by a business case which will not only look at financial value for money for the City but also wider economic, social and environmental benefits. This will enable a robust decision to be made and resources to be put in place to support delivery. The investment of council funds will reap huge dividends for traders and the city's economy and will firmly seal the market's viable future as a vibrant and thriving place for visitors and tourists to experience from all over the country and beyond."

The Cabinet Member for A Prosperous Norwich moved, and the Cabinet Member for Housing seconded the recommendations as set out in the report.

RESOLVED, unanimously, to:

- 1) Endorse the Strategic Outline Case for the Provisions Market
- 2) Agree to progress the next stage of development of options outlined in the report and develop a robust Outline Business Case for the project to define and increase confidence in future project delivery.
- 3) Agree to the use of £480k funded from reserves to progress to the next stage of development, which will include the development of an Outline Business Case and design development and further engagement to provide a robust basis to progress
- 4) Delegate the award of a contract for a professional team to provide the capacity and capability needed to develop the project through the RIBA stages and Five Case Model process, recommended by the HM Treasury Green Book, to the Executive Director of Resources in consultation with the Cabinet Member for A Prosperous Norwich.

¹ Following the meeting it was clarified that 1100 members of the public had been surveyed.

- 5) Agree to the use of £260K funded from reserves in order to fund design and construction costs to deliver the quick wins, outlined in this report.

11. Consideration of amendments to the Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Vehicle Policy

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for A Climate Responsive Norwich introduced the report.

Councillor Calvert asked the following question on behalf of the Green Group: "I note that there are potential proposals to require taxis to have CCTV. This has proved controversial in places like Peterborough which adopted such a policy but surrounding areas didn't. What work has been done to ensure that Norwich works closely with contiguous councils like south Norfolk and Broadland to ensure consistency in this regard?"

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for A Climate Responsive Norwich gave the following response: "The Department for Transport recently updated the Statutory guidance for taxi and private hire vehicle standards

The department's view is that the use of CCTV can provide a safer environment for the benefit of taxi/private hire vehicle passengers and drivers by:

- deterring and preventing the occurrence of crime
- reducing the fear of crime
- assisting the police in investigating incidents of crime
- assisting insurance companies in investigating motor vehicle accidents

When considering whether or not to introduce mandatory CCTV in vehicles, licensing authorities should consult to identify if there are local circumstances which indicate that the installation of CCTV in vehicles would have either a positive or an adverse net effect on the safety of taxi and private hire vehicle users, including children or vulnerable adults, and taking into account potential privacy issues.

The Council is about to go out for consultation on a new driver standards policy which would cover this area. The consultation will run from 20th January, should cabinet approve it. The consultation will involve members of the trade, neighbouring authorities and the police as well as members of the public.

Officers have a close working relationship with other authorities and are cognisant of their adopted driver and vehicle standards in relation to CCTV in taxi and private hire vehicles. Whilst not mandatory, South Norfolk and Broadland allow drivers to install CCTV in their vehicles following written approval. Currently NCC does not have any requirement for CCTV in vehicles, the proposed changes to the conditions would allow discretion for drivers to install CCTV should they request it. This will mean that the NCC conditions will align with South Norfolk and Broadland Council ensuring consistency in this regard."

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for A Climate Responsive Norwich moved and the Cabinet Member for An Open and Modern Council seconded the recommendations as set out in the report.

RESOLVED, unanimously, to:

- 1) Agree the proposed recommendations for consultation to the draft Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Vehicle Policy
- 2) Agree to commence a public consultation on the proposed draft policy for an 8-week period from 20 January 2025 to 17 March 2025 before returning for formal approval by Cabinet.

12. Residential Caravan Licensing Model Standards

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for A Climate Responsive Norwich introduced the report.

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for A Climate Responsive Norwich moved and the Cabinet Member for Housing seconded the recommendations as set out in the report.

RESOLVED, unanimously, to agree to the consultation on the proposed standards, conditions and management arrangements for a period of not less than 6 weeks beginning on 20 January 2025 running until 24 February 2025.

13. Delegation Clarification – Riverside Leisure Centre Solar Photovoltaic (PV).

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for A Climate Responsive Norwich presented the report. The Cabinet had agreed delegated authority in March 2024 to the Executive Director in consultation with the Cabinet Member to sign off the grant documents and delivery contracts for the installation of solar panels on the roof of Riverside Leisure Centre. During the pre-construction phase it was noted that the roof was end-of-life and would not be able to support the solar panels. The project would replace the roof of the Riverside Leisure Centre to ensure that the weight of the array could be supported. The cost of the replacement could be met within the agreed budget for the project.

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for A Climate Responsive Norwich moved and the Cabinet Member for Housing seconded the recommendations as set out in the report.

RESOLVED, unanimously, to agree to include the cost and activity of the re-roofing at Riverside Leisure Centre within the scope of the existing delegated authority, to the Executive Director of Communities and Housing and the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for A Climate Responsive Norwich as part of the project to install the solar PV system at the leisure centre.

14. Exclusion of the Press and Public

RESOLVED to exclude the press and public from the meeting during consideration of items *15 to *16 (below) on the grounds that they contained exempt information as defined in the relevant paragraphs within Part 1 of Schedule 12A, as amended, of the Local Government Act 1972.

***15. Disposal of Assets (Housing) (Para 3)**

The Cabinet Member for Housing presented the report. The Council reviewed its HRA properties on a regular basis to ensure that these were suitable properties to retain within

the HRA to ensure that value for money for the HRA was maintained. The receipts from the disposal of the asset would be used to reinvest in exiting properties or in more viable stock. In response to a question from Councillor Calvert the Cabinet Member for Housing confirmed that the properties within the HRA were separate to any other assets and the Council had a duty to protect the HRA, which was ringfenced specifically for council housing.

RESOLVED, unanimously, to approve the disposal of the land and property assets mentioned in the report.

***16. Norwich Provisions Market Strategic Outline Case – Exempt Appendix (Para 3)**

The Cabinet Member for A Prosperous Norwich provided a response to Councillor Calvert's question on behalf of the Green Group and assured members that extensive engagement would continue to take place with Market Traders as the project developed.

This item was noted under item 10 above.

CHAIR