

Scrutiny committee

Date: Thursday, 16 July 2015

Time: 16:30

Venue: Council chamber, City Hall, St Peters Street, Norwich, NR2 1NH

All group pre-meeting briefing – 16:00 Westwick Room

This is for members only and is not part of the formal scrutiny meeting which will follow at 16:30.

The pre-meeting is an opportunity for the committee to make final preparations before the start of the scrutiny committee meeting. The public will not be given access to the committee room before 16:30.

Committee members:

Councillors:

Wright (chair)
Maxwell (vice chair)
Bogelein
Coleshill
Grahame
Haynes
Manning
Packer
Peek
Raby
Ryan
Sands (S)
Schmierer

For further information please contact:

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Information for members of the public

Members of the public and the media have the right to attend meetings of full council, the cabinet and committees except where confidential information or exempt information is likely to be disclosed, and the meeting is therefore held in private.

For information about attending or speaking at meetings, please contact the committee officer above or refer to the council's website



If you would like this agenda in an alternative format, such as a larger or smaller font, audio or Braille, or in a different language, please contact the committee officer above.

AGENDA

1 Apologies

To receive apologies for absence

2 Public questions/petitions

To receive questions / petitions from the public (notice to be given to committee officer in advance of the meeting in accordance with appendix 1 of the council's constitution)

3 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)

4 Minutes

9 - 12

Purpose - To agree the accuracy of the minutes of the meeting held on 6 July 2015

5 Appointment of substitute for the Norfolk countywide community safety partnership scrutiny sub panel

To appoint a substitute for the community safety scrutiny sub panel.

6 Scrutiny committee work programme 2015 - 2016

13 - 34

Purpose - To note the scrutiny work programme and agree any potential topic(s) that may be tested against the TOPIC analysis for future inclusion onto the programme. For the assistance of members, the cabinet forward agenda is also included.

7 Update of the representative for the Norfolk health overview and scrutiny committee

An oral update of the meeting of the Norfolk health overview and scrutiny committee held on Thursday 16 July 2015

8 Benefit sanctions and their impact

35 - 48

Purpose - To look at how the council can work with partners to help those who may be affected by benefit sanctions with a particular focus on young people and the homeless.

9 Housing benefits and council tax reduction scheme claims processing

49 - 50

Purpose - to address the performance levels towards improving the average processing time for new housing benefit and council tax reduction scheme claims.

Date of publication: **Wednesday, 15 July 2015**

- T** is this, the right **TIME** to review the issue and is there sufficient officer time and resource available?
- O** what would be the **OBJECTIVE** of the scrutiny?
- P** can **PERFORMANCE** in this area be improved by scrutiny input?
- I** what would be the public **INTEREST** in placing this topic onto the work programme?
- C** will any scrutiny activity on this matter contribute to the council's activities as agreed to in the **CORPORATE PLAN**?

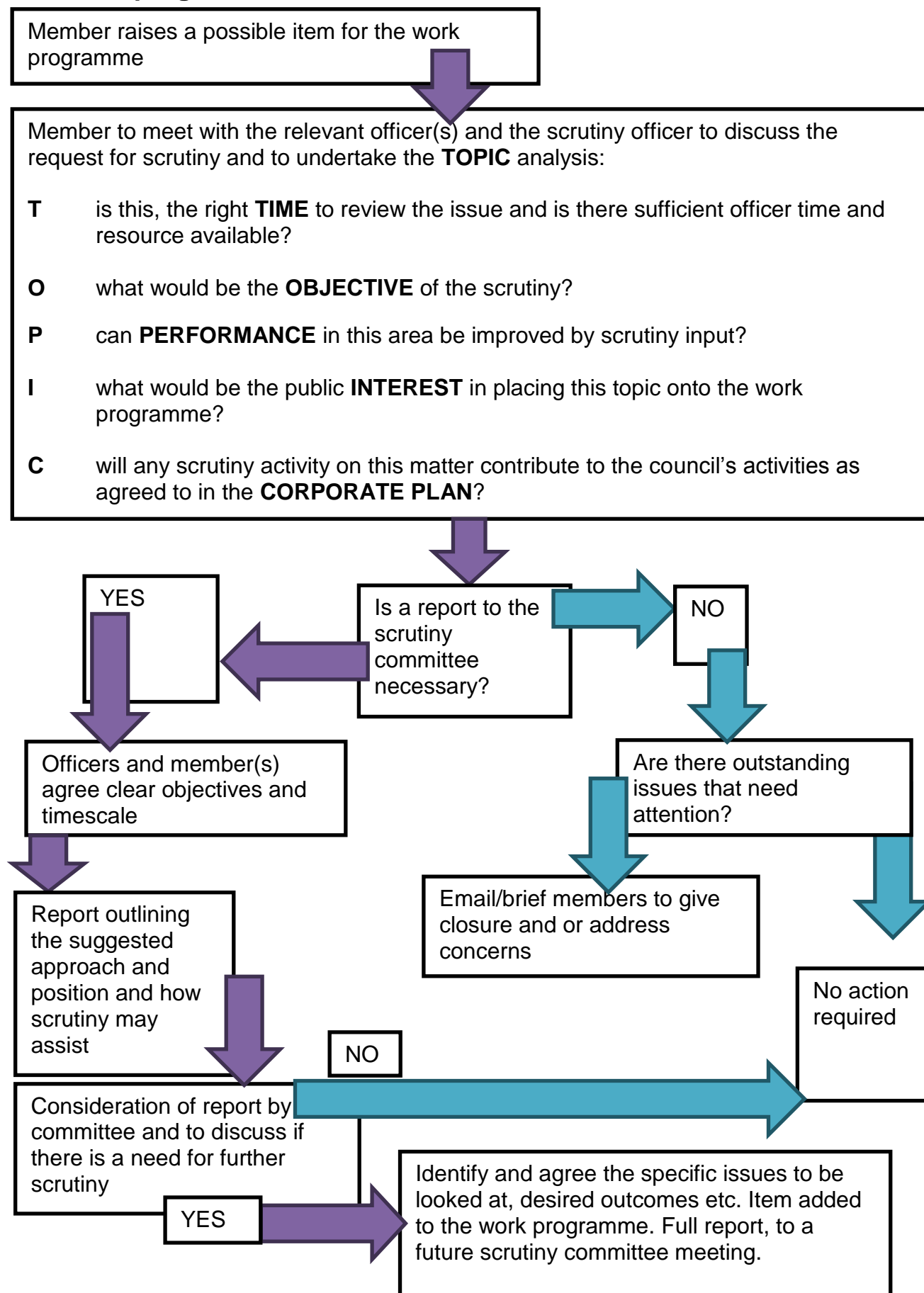
Once the TOPIC analysis has been undertaken, a joint decision should then be reached as to whether a report to the scrutiny committee is required. If it is decided that a report is not required, the issue will not be pursued any further. However, if there are outstanding issues, these could be picked up by agreeing that a briefing email to members be sent, or other appropriate action by the relevant officer.

If it is agreed that the scrutiny request topic should be explored further by the scrutiny committee a short report should be written for a future meeting of the scrutiny committee, to be taken under the standing work programme item, so that members are able to consider if they should place the item on to the work programme. This report should outline a suggested approach if the committee was minded to take on the topic and outline the purpose using the outcome of the consideration of the topic via the TOPIC analysis. Also the report should provide an overview of the current position with regard to the topic under consideration.

By using the flowchart, it is hoped that members and officers will be aided when giving consideration to whether or not the item should be added to the scrutiny committee work programme. This should help to ensure that the scope and purpose will be covered by any future report. The outcome of this should further assist the committee and the officers working with the committee to be able to produce informed outcomes that are credible, influential with SMART recommendations.

Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant and Time-bound

Guidance flow chart for placing items onto the scrutiny committee work programme



Working style of the Scrutiny committee and a protocol for those attending scrutiny

- All scrutiny committee meetings will be carried out in a spirit of mutual trust and respect
- Members of the scrutiny committee will not be subject to whipping arrangements by party groups
- Scrutiny committee members will work together and will attempt to achieve evidence based consensus and recommendations
- Members of the committee will take the lead in the selection of topics for scrutiny
- The scrutiny committee operates as a critical friend and offers constructive challenge to decision makers to support improved outcomes
- Invited attendees will be advised of the time, date and location of the meeting to which they are invited to give evidence
- The invited attendee will be made aware of the reasons for the invitation and of any documents and information that the committee wish them to provide
- Reasonable notice will be given to the invited attendee of **all** of the committees requirements so that these can be provided for in full at the earliest opportunity (there should be no nasty surprises at committee)
- Whenever possible it is expected that members of the scrutiny committee will share and plan questioning with the rest of the committee in advance of the meeting
- The invited attendee will be provided with copies of **all relevant** reports, papers and background information
- Practical arrangements, such as facilities for presentations will be in place. The layout of the meeting room will be appropriate
- The chair of the committee will introduce themselves to the invited attendee before evidence is given and; all those attending will be treated with courtesy and respect. The chair of the committee will make sure that all questions put to the witness are made in a clear and orderly manner



SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

16:35 to 18:10

6 July 2015

Present: Councillors Wright (chair), Maxwell (vice chair), Bogelein, Bradford (substitute for Peek) Coleshill, Grahame, Haynes, Manning, Raby, Ryan, Sands (M)(substitute for Packer) Sands (S) and Schmierer

Apologies: Councillors Packer and Peek

1. Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

2. Minutes

RESOLVED to agree the accuracy of the minutes of the meeting held on 11 June 2015.

3. Scrutiny committee work programme 2015 -2016

The chair updated the committee on the work programme and said that the topic on the co-operative agenda in local government and the topic on academies would be scoped over the summer.

RESOLVED to note the scrutiny committee work programme 2015 – 2016

The chair agreed to take item 6 ‘establishing a local housing company’ as the final item due to the need to exclude the public before discussing the appendices.

4. Quarter 4 performance report

The policy and performance manager presented the report. He thanked members for the questions that had been received in advance of the meeting and said that it was always preferable for them to submit detailed questions on the performance indicators in advance of the meeting to allow relevant officers to provide a response. The chair suggested that any detailed questions be sent to the scrutiny officer who would arrange for the relevant head of service to provide information.

RESOLVED to:

- a) note the quarter 4 performance report; and
- b) ask members to submit detailed questions on the performance data to the scrutiny officer.

5. Norfolk health overview and scrutiny committee update 28 May 2015

The chair reminded the committee that the first meeting of the Norfolk health overview and scrutiny committee had taken place before the committee appointed its representative.

Councillor Bogelein gave a brief update on the training session she received as the representative. She said that the remit of the committee was only to comment on commissioned services at a local level.

RESOLVED to:

- a) note the update from the representative; and
- b) remind members to liaise with Councillor Bogelein if they wish to raise any issues

6. Establishment of a local housing development company

The executive head of regeneration and development presented the report.

Members discussed the governance arrangements set out in the report. The cabinet member for resources and income generation said that similar governance arrangements already existed within local government with joint ventures and directed members to the examples given in the report.

In response to a member's question, the executive head of regeneration and development assured the committee that the business plan would be under ongoing review and that development opportunities would be considered as they arose.

He said that the residents on the new development would pay a maintenance supplement and the housing development company would take responsibility for maintenance and would ensure that all tenants would be catered for and would be managed effectively.

A member questioned the location and the appearance of the planned social housing. The executive head of regeneration and development said that a lot of thought had been put into the design of the properties and the social housing would have the same design as the other properties and would be spread throughout the development. He also confirmed that each property for private sale would be freehold.

RESOLVED to note the report on establishment of a local housing company.

7. Exclusion of the public

RESOLVED to exclude the public from the meeting during consideration of item *8 below on the grounds contained in the relevant paragraphs of schedule 12a of the local government act 1972 (as amended).

***8. Establishment of a local housing development company (appendices)**

The executive head of regeneration and development presented the appendices and answered member's questions on the following topics:

- Rental prices
- Sensitivity analysis
- Leases and conditions of sale
- Risk
- Tax requirements

Following this discussion, it was:-

RESOLVED to ask cabinet to consider:

- a) that the scrutiny committee were in favour of taking the project forward and were enthusiastic to see it expanded to other development sites; and
- b) making the building of sustainable communities an objective of the local housing development company.

CHAIR

DATE OF MEETING	TOPIC FOR SCRUTINY	RESPONSIBLE OFFICER, CABINET PORTFOLIO COUNCILLOR or ORGANISATION	SCOPE - REASON FOR TOPIC REQUEST AND OUTCOME SOUGHT
6 July 2015	Quarter 4 performance monitoring (14/15)	Cllr Alan Waters, Russell O'Keefe and Phil Shreeve	Identification of any causes for concern and note successes arising from this 6 monthly review of performance monitoring data
6 July 2015	Establishing a local housing company	Cllr Bert Bremner and David Moorcroft	Pre-scrutiny of the report going to cabinet that outlines arrangements for the council towards establishing a local housing company to allow the council to take forward housing development in Norwich.
6 July 2015	Update from May meeting of the Norfolk county health overview and scrutiny committee	Steve Goddard	For the committee to note the work of NHOSC and comment on any implications for Norwich residents for the rep to take back to the next NHOSC meeting.
16 July 2015	Update of the rep for the Norfolk county health overview and scrutiny committee	Cllr Sandra Bogelein	A brief Oral update of the meeting of NHOSC that was held earlier in the day at county hall. (A written update will be available at the September meeting along with the September update)
16 July 2015	Overview of DWP sanctions	Phil Shreeve	To look at how the council can work with partners to help those who may be affected with a particular focus on young people and the homeless.

DATE OF MEETING	TOPIC FOR SCRUTINY	RESPONSIBLE ORGANISATION OFFICER CABINET PORTFOLIO COUNCILLOR	SCOPE - REASON FOR TOPIC REQUEST AND OUTCOME SOUGHT
16 July 2015	Benefits processing times	Anton Bull, LGSS and Cllr Alan Waters	To address the performance levels towards improving the average processing time for new housing benefit and council tax reduction scheme claims.
17 September 2015	Update of the rep for the Norfolk county health overview and scrutiny committee (July & Sept report)	Cllr rep and Steve Goddard	For the committee to note the work of NHOSC and comment on any implications for Norwich residents for the rep to take back to the next meeting of NHOSC
17 September 2015	Looking at the co-operative agenda in local government	Cllr Alan Waters, Russell O'Keefe and Phil Shreeve	Looking at co-operative innovations and solutions and suggestions for how Norwich might benefit. (Subject to final agreement over scope)
15 October 2015	Assessment of the corporate plan against the programme of the new government	Cllr Alan Waters, Russell O'Keefe and Phil Shreeve	To gain an overview of the new governments programme and any implications this may have for the council's corporate plan
15 October 2015	Transformation programme for the Council	Cllr Alan Waters and Russell O'Keefe	For the scrutiny committee to comment on and make suggestions towards the development of the council's programme for transformation

DATE OF MEETING	TOPIC FOR SCRUTINY	RESPONSIBLE ORGANISATION OFFICER CABINET PORTFOLIO COUNCILLOR	SCOPE - REASON FOR TOPIC REQUEST AND OUTCOME SOUGHT
12 November 2015	Quarter 2 performance monitoring (15/16)	Cllr Alan waters, Russell O'Keefe and Phil Shreeve	Identification of any causes for concern and note successes arising from this 6 monthly review of performance monitoring data
12 November 2015	Review of community space - update on progress	Cllr Keith Driver, Russell O'Keefe and Bob Cronk	A report back to the scrutiny committee on how work has progressed since the task and finish group.
12 November 2015	Update of the rep for the Norfolk county health overview and scrutiny committee (Oct report)	Councillor rep and Steve Goddard	For the committee to note the work of the HOSC and comment on any implications for Norwich residents for the residents for the rep to take back to NHOSC
12 November 2015	Update on the delivery of the work plan for the building social inclusion and capital in Norwich project	Cllr Keith Driver and Russell O'Keefe	For the committee to receive and note a briefing paper as an update on progress at this early stage in the work.
17 December 2015	Transformation programme for the Council	Cllr Alan Waters and Russell O'Keefe	Ongoing scrutiny to consider the development of the transformation programme.
17 December 2015	Annual equality information report	Cllr Vaughan Thomas and Phil Shreeve	Pre scrutiny of the report before it goes to cabinet

DATE OF MEETING	TOPIC FOR SCRUTINY	RESPONSIBLE ORGANISATION OFFICER CABINET PORTFOLIO COUNCILLOR	SCOPE - REASON FOR TOPIC REQUEST AND OUTCOME SOUGHT
17 December 2015	Update of the rep for the Norfolk county health overview and scrutiny committee (Dec report)	Councillor rep and Steve Goddard	For the committee to note the work of the NHOSC and comment on any implications for Norwich residents for the rep to take back to NHOSC
28 January 2016	Pre-scrutiny of the proposed policy and budget frame work	Cllr Alan Waters, Russell O'Keefe and Justine Hartley	To make suggestions to cabinet regarding the proposed budget's ability to deliver the council's overarching policy and look into how tenants can use communal areas
28 January 2016	(Environmental strategy) Yearly update on the progress statement	Cllr Bert Bremner, Richard Willson and David Moorcroft	Identification of any issues to consider and note successes and progress reported in the progress statement
25 February 2016	Verge and pavement issues	Cllr Bert Bremner, David Moorcroft and Andy Ellis	Pre- scrutiny of the cabinet report on a review of verge and pavement issues
25 February 2016	Update of the rep for the Norfolk county health overview and scrutiny committee	Councillor rep and Steve Goddard	For the committee to note the work of the NHOSC and comment on any implications for Norwich residents for the rep to take back to NHOSC

17 March 2016	Annual review of scrutiny	Cllr James Wright and Steve Goddard	To agree the annual review of the scrutiny committee's work 2015 to 2016 and recommend it for adoption of the council
17 March 2015	Academies		(Subject to final agreement over scope)

Scrutiny committee tracker

2015 – 2016

Date	Topic	Responsible officer	Scrutiny request	Outcome(s) or current position
11 June 2015	Verge and pavement issues	Andy Watt	For the scrutiny committee members to receive an update on progress regarding verge and pavement issues raised at earlier meetings.	Members received an email update from the head of city development services on 12 June reporting on the current position. The scrutiny committee will also be pre scrutinising a report that will cover the review of verge and pavement issues at the 25 February 2016 meeting.
11 June 2015	Best practice in tackling transphobic hate crimes	Bob Cronk	For the head of neighbourhood services to provide an update and information as an email briefing to the scrutiny committee	Ongoing
11 June 2015	The council's consultation process	Nikki Rotsos	For a briefing paper to be circulated, for scrutiny members to gain an overview and understanding of the council's current work in this area.	Ongoing

Date	Topic	Responsible officer	Scrutiny request	Outcome(s) or current position
11 June 2015	The communications approach of the scrutiny committee	Chair of scrutiny and Nikki Rotsos	To make this an ongoing piece of work with a view to make suggestions on how members advertise and publicise their work.	Ongoing

FORWARD AGENDA: CABINET, COUNCIL, SCRUTINY AND AUDIT COMMITTEES and MEMBER BRIEFINGS 2015 – 2016

ALLOCATED ITEMS							
Meeting	Report	Purpose	Portfolio holder + Senior Officer + Report author	Report signed off by	Management clearance	Cabinet or portfolio holder briefing?	Exempt?
SCRUTINY 6 JULY 2015	Update from Norfolk County Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee	To update members on the meeting of the Norfolk County Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 28 May 2015.	Steve Goddard				
SCRUTINY 6 JULY 2015	Quarter 4 2014-15 performance report.	To identify any causes for concern and to note the success arising from this look at performance monitoring data.	Russell O'Keefe				
SCRUTINY 6 JULY 2015	Establishing a local housing company.	Pre-scrutiny of the report going to cabinet that outlines arrangements for the council towards establishing a local housing company to allow the council to take forward housing development in Norwich.	Dave Moorcroft				
CABINET 8 JULY 2015	Norwich and HCA Strategic Partnership business plan 2015-6 – KEY DECISION	To approve the 2015-6 business plan for the Norwich and HCA Strategic partnership	Cllr Waters Gwyn Jones City Growth and Development Manager EXT 2364	24 Jun	Dave Moorcroft	PH	NO
CABINET 8 JULY 2015	CIL Business Plan 2016-17 – KEY DECISION	To approve the CIL Business Plan for 2016-17 and to agree some changes to the process for engaging local communities in decisions about	Cllr Stonard Gwyn Jones City Growth and Development	24 Jun	Dave Moorcroft	PH	NO

ALLOCATED ITEMS							
Meeting	Report	Purpose	Portfolio holder + Senior Officer + Report author	Report signed off by	Management clearance	Cabinet or portfolio holder briefing?	Exempt?
		spending neighbourhood CIL	Manager EXT 2364				
CABINET 8 JULY 2015	Review of corporate risk register	To update members on the review by the corporate leadership team of key risks facing the council, and the associated mitigating actions as noted in the corporate risk register.	Cllr Stonard Steve Dowson EXT 2575 Neil Hunter 01223 715317	24 Jun	Justine Hartley		NO
CABINET 8 JULY 2015	Revenue budget monitoring 2014-15 – year end 2014-15	To update cabinet on the revenue outturn for the year 2014-15, and the consequent general fund and housing revenue account balances.	Cllr Stonard Justine Hartley Chief Finance Officer EXT 2440	24 Jun	Justine Hartley		NO
CABINET 8 JULY 2015	Revenue budget monitoring 2015-16: Period 02	To update cabinet on the financial position as at 31 May 2015, the forecast outturn for the year 2015-16, and the consequent forecast general fund and housing revenue account balances.	Cllr Stonard Justine Hartley Chief Finance Officer EXT 2440	24 Jun	Justine Hartley		NO
CABINET 8 JULY 2015	Capital budget monitoring 2014-15 – final outturn	To update cabinet on the outturn of the housing and non-housing capital programmes.	Cllr Stonard Justine Hartley Chief Finance Officer EXT 2440	24 Jun	Justine Hartley		NO
CABINET 8 JULY 2015	Establishing a local housing company – KEY DECISION	To approve the establishment of a local housing company to allow the council to take forward development.	Portfolio holder for housing Andy Watt Head of city development services	24 Jun	Dave Moorcroft	PH	NO

ALLOCATED ITEMS							
Meeting	Report	Purpose	Portfolio holder + Senior Officer + Report author	Report signed off by	Management clearance	Cabinet or portfolio holder briefing?	Exempt?
			EXT 2691 Gwyn Jones City growth and development manager EXT 2364				
CABINET 8 JULY 2015	Establishing a local housing company – APPENDICES	To review the appendices relating to item 11.	Portfolio holder for housing Andy Watt Head of city development services EXT 2691 Gwyn Jones City growth and development manager EXT 2364	24 Jun	Dave Moorcroft	PH	NO
CABINET 8 JULY 2015	Managing assets	To consider the disposal of an asset in the general fund	Cllr Stonard Andy Watt Head of city development services EXT 2691 David Rogers Client property and parking manager EXT 2463 Ian Bromley-	24 Jun	Dave Moorcroft	PH	YES (Paragraph 3)

ALLOCATED ITEMS							
Meeting	Report	Purpose	Portfolio holder + Senior Officer + Report author	Report signed off by	Management clearance	Cabinet or portfolio holder briefing?	Exempt?
			Derry NPS Norwich TEL 01603 227901 Charles Mason NPS Norwich TEL 01603 227968				
CABINET 8 JULY 2015	Compulsory purchase order	To authorise the promotion of a compulsory purchase order under Section 226 (1) (a) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, to facilitate development, redevelopment and improvement, on or in relation to land, that will promote or improve the economic, environmental or social well-being of Norwich.	Cllr Bremner Andy Watt Head of city development services EXT 2691 Andrew Turnbull senior development officer (enabling) EXT 277	24 Jun	Dave Moorcroft		YES (Paragraph 3)
SCRUTINY 16 JULY 2015	Overview of DWP sanctions	To look at how the council can work with partners to help those who may be affected with a particular focus on young people and the homeless.	Phil Shreeve Policy and performance manager		Russell O'Keefe		
SCRUTINY 16 JULY 2015	Benefits processing times	To address the performance levels towards improving the average processing time for new housing benefit and council tax reduction	Anton Bull Executive head of Business relationship		Anton Bull		

ALLOCATED ITEMS							
Meeting	Report	Purpose	Portfolio holder + Senior Officer + Report author	Report signed off by	Management clearance	Cabinet or portfolio holder briefing?	Exempt?
		scheme claims.	management and democracy				
COUNCIL 21 JULY 2015	Annual audit committee report 2014-15	To present of the annual audit committee report 2014-15 to council.	Justine Hartley Chief Finance Officer EXT 2440		Justine Hartley	PH	NO
COUNCIL 21 JULY 2015	Community Infrastructure levy – Norwich Business Plan 2016-17	To approve the draft Norwich annual business plan for 2016-17	Cllr Waters Gwyn Jones City Growth and Development Manager EXT 2364		Dave Moorcroft	PH	NO
CABINET 9 SEP 2015	Threescore phase 2 contractor – KEY DECISION	To appoint a contractor to construct the development of Threescore phase 2	Cllr Stonard Gwyn Jones City Growth and Development Manager EXT 2364		Dave Moorcroft	PH	NO
CABINET 9 SEP 2015	Norwich economic strategy action plan 2015-16 and review of 2014-15 action plan	To consider the council's Economic strategy action plan for the period 2015 - 2016 for publication and review the action plan for the period 2014-15	Andy Watt Head of city development services EXT 2691 Ellen Tilney Economic development manager		Dave Moorcroft		NO

ALLOCATED ITEMS							
Meeting	Report	Purpose	Portfolio holder + Senior Officer + Report author	Report signed off by	Management clearance	Cabinet or portfolio holder briefing?	Exempt?
			07771 562069				
CABINET 9 SEP 2015	Adoption of the greater Norwich homelessness strategy 2015-20	To consider adoption of a homelessness strategy for greater Norwich, following public consultation	Cllr Harris Chris Hancock Housing strategy officer EXT 2852 Andy Watt Head of city development services EXT 2691		Dave Moorcroft	PH	NO
CABINET 9 SEP 2015	Procurement of works – for structural maintenance and improvement – structural repairs at Heathgate – phase 2	To inform cabinet of the procurement process for a large structural repair contract and to ask for approval to award the contract.	Cllr Harris Russell O'Keefe Gary Atkins Carol Marney		Russell O'Keefe	PH	NO
CABINET 9 SEP 2015	Sites to be developed for the affordable homes programme	To approve the disposal of the sites and to invite registered provider partners to bid for the package of sites which will be developed for affordable housing	Cllr Harris Debbie Gould Senior housing development officer EXT 2851 Andy Watt Head of city development services EXT 2691		Dave Moorcroft	PH	NO
CABINET	Procurement of	To confirm previously agreed budget	SO=Gary Atkins,				NO

ALLOCATED ITEMS							
Meeting	Report	Purpose	Portfolio holder + Senior Officer + Report author	Report signed off by	Management clearance	Cabinet or portfolio holder briefing?	Exempt?
9 SEP 2015	thermodynamic hot water systems for social housing – KEY DECISION	and authorise selected contractor.	RA=Jay Warnes				
CABINET 9 SEP 2015	Review of 2014-15 economic strategy action plan	To review the council's economic strategy action plan for the period 2014-15	Cllr Stonard Andy Watt Head of city development services EXT 2691 Ellen Tilney Economic development manager 07771 562069		Dave Moorcroft	PH	NO
CABINET 9 SEP 2015	Revenues and benefits shared service provision - KEY DECISION	To approve the next phase of shared services for revenues and benefits.	Cllrs Waters, Stonard, Thomas Anton Bull Executive head of service business relationship management and democracy EXT 2326		Anton Bull	PH	YES
CABINET 9 SEP 2015	NPS Norwich Ltd business plan 2015-16	To consider the business plan for NPS Norwich Ltd for 2015-16	Cllr Stonard Andy Watt Head of city development services		Dave Moorcroft	PH	NO

ALLOCATED ITEMS							
Meeting	Report	Purpose	Portfolio holder + Senior Officer + Report author	Report signed off by	Management clearance	Cabinet or portfolio holder briefing?	Exempt?
			EXT 2691 David Rogers Client property and parking manager EXT 2463 Ian Bromley- Derry, NPS TEL 01603 227901				
CABINET 9 SEP 2015	Procurement of works – for Estate Aesthetics Works at Hobart Square	To inform of the procurement process for a large structural repair contract and to ask for approval to award the contract.	Cllr Harris Russell O'Keefe Gary Atkins Carol Marney		Russell O'Keefe	PH	NO
CABINET 9 SEP 2015	Use of right to buy one for one receipts	To consider the use of right to buy one for one receipts to support the provision of new homes by registered providers	Cllr Bremner Cllr Stonard Andy Watt Head of city development services EXT 2691 Andrew Turnbull senior development officer (enabling) EXT 2778 Justine Hartley Chief finance officer EXT 2440		Dave Moorcroft	PH	NO

ALLOCATED ITEMS							
Meeting	Report	Purpose	Portfolio holder + Senior Officer + Report author	Report signed off by	Management clearance	Cabinet or portfolio holder briefing?	Exempt?
CABINET 9 SEP 2015	Norfolk Strategic Framework update	To update cabinet on progress on the Norfolk Strategic Framework update	Cllr Bremner Graham Nelson Mike Burrell EXT 2525		Dave Moorcroft	PH	NO
SCRUTINY 17 SEP 2015	Looking at the co-operative agenda in local government	Looking at co-operative innovations and solutions and suggestions for how Norwich might benefit.	Cllr Alan Waters Phil Shreeve Policy and performance manager		Russell O'Keefe		
COUNCIL 29 SEP 2015							
CABINET 7 OCT 2015							
SCRUTINY 15 OCT 2015	Assessment of the corporate plan against the programme of the new government	To gain an overview of the new governments programme and any implications this may have for the council's corporate plan	Cllr Alan Waters Phil Shreeve Policy and performance manager		Russell O'Keefe		
SCRUTINY 15 OCT 2015	Transformation programme for the Council	For the scrutiny committee to comment on and make suggestions towards the development of the council's programme for transformation	Cllr Alan Waters		Russell O'Keefe		

ALLOCATED ITEMS							
Meeting	Report	Purpose	Portfolio holder + Senior Officer + Report author	Report signed off by	Management clearance	Cabinet or portfolio holder briefing?	Exempt?
CABINET 4 NOV 2015							
SCRUTINY 12 NOV 2015	Quarter 2 performance monitoring (15/16)	Identification of any causes for concern and note successes arising from this 6 monthly review of performance monitoring data	Cllr Alan waters, Russell O'Keefe and Phil Shreeve		Russell O'Keefe		
SCRUTINY 12 NOV 2015	Review of community space - update on progress	A report back to the scrutiny committee on how work has progressed since the task and finish group.	Cllr Keith Driver, Russell O'Keefe and Bob Cronk		Russell O'Keefe		
SCRUTINY 12 NOV 2015	Update of the rep for the Norfolk county health overview and scrutiny committee (Oct report)	For the committee to note the work of the HOSC and comment on any implications for Norwich residents for the residents for the rep to take back to NHOSC	Councillor rep and Steve Goddard		Russell O'Keefe		
SCRUTINY 12 NOV 2015	Update on the delivery of the work plan for the building social inclusion and capital in Norwich project	For the committee to receive and note a briefing paper as an update on progress at this early stage in the work.	Cllr Keith Driver and Russell O'Keefe		Russell O'Keefe		
COUNCIL 24 NOV 2015							
CABINET 9 DEC 2015							

ALLOCATED ITEMS							
Meeting	Report	Purpose	Portfolio holder + Senior Officer + Report author	Report signed off by	Management clearance	Cabinet or portfolio holder briefing?	Exempt?
SCRUTINY 17 DEC 2015	Transformation programme for the Council	Ongoing scrutiny to consider the development of the transformation programme.	Cllr Alan Waters and Russell O'Keefe		Russell O'Keefe		
SCRUTINY 17 DEC 2015	Annual equality information report	Pre scrutiny of the report before it goes to cabinet	Cllr Vaughan Thomas and Phil Shreeve		Russell O'Keefe		
SCRUTINY 17 DEC 2015	Update of the rep for the Norfolk county health overview and scrutiny committee	For the committee to note the work of the NHOSC and comment on any implications for Norwich residents for the rep to take back to NHOSC	Councillor rep and Steve Goddard				
CABINET 13 JAN 2016							
COUNCIL 26 JAN 2015							
SCRUTINY 28 JAN 2015	Pre-scrutiny of the proposed policy and budget frame work	To make suggestions to cabinet regarding the proposed budget's ability to deliver the council's overarching policy and look into how tenants can use communal areas	Cllr Alan Waters, Justine Hartley		Russell O'Keefe		
SCRUTINY 28 JAN 2015	(Environmental strategy) Yearly update on the progress statement	Identification of any issues to consider and note successes and progress reported in the progress statement	Cllr Bert Bremner, Richard Willson		David Moorcroft		

ALLOCATED ITEMS							
Meeting	Report	Purpose	Portfolio holder + Senior Officer + Report author	Report signed off by	Management clearance	Cabinet or portfolio holder briefing?	Exempt?
CABINET 3 FEB 2016							
COUNCIL 16 FEB 2015							
SCRUTINY 25 FEB 2015	Verge and pavement issues	Pre- scrutiny of the cabinet report on a review of verge and pavement issues	Cllr Bert Bremner, and Andy Ellis		David Moorcroft		
SCRUTINY 25 FEB 2015	Update of the rep for the Norfolk county health overview and scrutiny committee	For the committee to note the work of the NHOSC and comment on any implications for Norwich residents for the rep to take back to NHOSC	Councillor rep and Steve Goddard				
CABINET 9 MAR 2016							
SCRUTINY 17 MAR 2015	Annual review of scrutiny	To agree the annual review of the scrutiny committee's work 2015 to 2016 and recommend it for adoption by the council	Cllr James Wright and Steve Goddard				
COUNCIL 22 MAR 2015							

UNALLOCATED ITEMS							
Meeting	Report	Purpose	Portfolio holder Senior Officer	Report signed off by	Management clearance	Cabinet or portfolio holder briefing?	Exempt?
CABINET	Public art donation policy – KEY DECISION	To seek approval for a policy that determines how decisions will be made about when and under what circumstances the council will agree to the installation of public art on the highway or other land that it owns or manages.	Cllr Arthur Nikki Rotsos Executive head of service for communications, customers and culture EXT 2211 Ben Webster Design, conservation and landscape manager EXT 2518		Nikki Rotsos	PH	No
CABINET	Transatlantic trade and investment partnership	Follow up of council motion (22 July 2014) referring item to cabinet.					
CABINET	Private sector housing charging policy	Seeking approval of the revised policy	Cllr Bert Bremner Portfolio holder Emma Smith Housing Strategy Officer EXT: 2937		Dave Moorcroft	PH	No
CABINET	Mountergate West phase 2 – KEY DECISION	To approve the entering into collaboration agreement with the Great Hospital to take forwards the development of housing on the Mountergate West site.	Cllr Harris Andy Watt Head of city development services		Dave Moorcroft	PH	YES (Paragraph 3)

			EXT 2691 Gwyn Jones City growth and development manager EXT 2364				
CABINET	Contract award: Threescore Sales and Marketing – KEY DECISION	To appoint an agent to carry out sales and marketing work for Threescore phase 2	Cllr Harris Cllr Stonard Gwyn Jones City Growth and Development Manager EXT 2364		Dave Moorcroft	PH	NO
CABINET	Review of the council's constitution	To recommend to council adoption of the proposed amendments to the constitution.	Cllr Waters Andy Emms Democratic services manager EXT 2459		Anton Bull	PH	No

Norwich City Council
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
ITEM 8

REPORT for meeting to be held on 16 July 2015

Benefit sanctions and their impact

Summary:

To look at how the council can work with partners to help those who may be affected by benefit sanctions with a particular focus on young people and the homeless.

Recommendation:

That scrutiny committee considers what further work may be undertaken within existing resources and make recommendations to cabinet if further suggestions are made.

Contact Officers:

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Background

1. At the meeting on 11 June 2015 scrutiny committee added to its work programme an item to consider benefit sanctions and their impact, with particular reference to younger people and homelessness.
2. A representative from the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) has been invited along with representatives of two key voluntary agencies whom the council has commissioned as part of a wider debt, money and welfare advice consortium (Equal Lives and Mancroft Advice Project).
3. The Mancroft Advice Project (MAP) component of the consortium (supported jointly with Norfolk County Council) was commissioned specifically to work with younger people at risk of sanctions.
4. Appended to this report is a longer document looking at the most recent data available on sanctions as applied to residents of Norwich. It is anticipated that these data can act as an evidence base upon which to make further enquiries to fulfil the purpose of the topic. These are DWP datasets and these numbers and comments therefore represent council officers' understanding and interpretation of these data.
5. As a city council we are unable to overturn or stop national policy. However we may be able to work with others to reduce the risks of a person being sanctioned or mitigate some of the implications of being sanctioned.

Data Headlines

6. In 2014 there were approximately 2,000 Job Seekers Allowance (JSA) and 50 Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) sanctions in Norwich (slightly more if one includes sanctions imposed after a review or appeal)
7. In line with general national trends the number of JSA claimants in Norwich referred for a sanction decision increased quite strongly in 2013 before reducing (albeit at levels higher than in 2009 – 2012) in 2014, particularly from late 2014, against a backdrop of falling numbers of JSA claimants.
8. Approximately 35-45% of those decisions resulted in a sanction, which is lower than the national rate of around 50%.
9. Very generally JSA sanction rates in Norwich at about 5% of JSA claims mirrors the national picture compared to more fluctuating rates in referral.
10. Three in four sanctions were applied to a claimant who was neither disabled nor a lone parent. However one in five was applied to a claimant with a disability.
11. About a quarter of JSA claimants in 24 were under 25. However 43% of sanctions were applied to someone in that age group.

12. As the appended report says we do not have local data on housing tenure. However national data from Homeless Link suggests that 31% of homeless JSA claimants had been sanctioned compared to 3% of the non-homeless group.
13. The main reasons for being referred for a sanction in 2014 were:
- Failure to participate in a scheme for assisting person to obtain employment (such as Work Programme) without good reason (36%)
 - Not actively seeking employment (33.1%)
 - Failure to attend or failure to participate in an adviser interview without good reason (16.5%)
14. Of these reasons though those referred for not participating in a scheme were sanctioned at a rate of one in four whilst those “not actively seeking employment” were sanctioned in 87% of the cases
15. Recent data also suggest that whilst overall 42% of referrals resulted in a sanction being applied those that were taken to a decision review resulted in a sanction at half that rate but those at “mandatory reconsideration” were sanctioned seven out of ten times and all cases at full appeal.
16. It does appear that recently the severity and level of sanction has increased with more “intermediate” sanctions being applied and around one in ten sanctions being “higher level” (which results in loss of benefit for between 13 and 152 weeks. We cannot say for how many weeks these higher levels have been applied).
17. There were large increases (from a very low starting base) in ESA referrals in 2013 and 2014 resulting in about 50 sanctions in 2014. Many referrals are cancelled prior to a decision.
18. National data suggested the sanction rate is around 2% (compared to around 5% for JSA).

Possible implications and commentary

19. We cannot necessarily demonstrate direct causal relationships between sanctions and other outcomes. However some anecdotal evidence and officer feedback suggests some of the following:
- Some homeless residents are “opting out” of the system altogether and consequently may be unable to meet any level of basic living or housing costs
 - There has been a marked increase in the use of local food banks in recent years, although there are likely to be multiple factors in this increase and not solely sanctions

- It is not clear to some officers about how much advice is incorporated into a formal sanctions decision notice to support claimants
 - In all cases after a sanction housing benefit payments are suspended pending proof of the change in income. We know of some cases where housing benefit is cancelled pending a fresh claim when the information required is not provided or the need not understood. All sanctioned claimants can still claim Housing Benefit (HB) but they may not be aware of this.
 - Housing staff report increases in workload trying to follow up suspended housing benefit claims to encourage residents to keep their HB claim live as well as increases in arrears, although an exact amount is not readily quantifiable
20. We recently commissioned a new financial debt and money advice consortium, two members of which (MAP and Equal Lives) have been invited to attend this meeting for their views on this topic. The MAP component in particular was specifically commissioned to work with younger people most likely to be at risk of sanctioning as it was recognised that this was likely to be a problem in Norwich. The data appear to bear this out.
21. These data also suggest that in some cases early advice and challenge may reduce the risk of a sanction being applied after a decision referral has been requested. However it also suggests that where a resident has been identified as not actively seeking work their chance of being sanctioned, once referred for a decision, are much higher. It may of course be the case that referrals via work programmes (where one in four referrals result in a sanction rather than nine in ten) are governed by less flexible rules, allowing work programme and similar providers little leeway to refer or not if certain criteria are met. This may be a useful question to raise with the DWP to understand what scope there may be to limit the number of referrals if these more often than not do not result in a sanction being applied.
22. Although national evidence suggests that the sanctions regime does seem to increase the numbers of people moving off benefits, it raises questions as to whether it has the desired effect of increasing the numbers moving into employment
23. We do not at this stage know how conditionality and potential sanctioning will impact working households under the new Universal Credit system where low income households within any amended tax credit system may need to demonstrate they are looking to “improve” their employment. This may also be a useful line of enquiry to understand how this has operated within Universal Credit pathfinder areas
24. It should also be noted that Discretionary Housing payments (DHP) cannot be used to make good losses of JSA / ESA following a sanction.

Possible lines of enquiry

It is of course up to members of the committee to decide areas to pursue. However bearing in mind the scope of the topic and the desire to make a positive impact on the lives of residents some possible areas may include:

DWP

25. How can information sharing around sanctions be improved to mitigate possible negative impact on HB claims, particularly when conditionality starts to effect working households under Universal Credit?
26. What scope is there to offer advice within formal sanction notifications?
27. If just one if four referrals from work programme or similar schemes results in a sanction what scope is there to filter referrals where sanctioning is ultimately unlikely?

MAP

28. How can young people be supported to ensure that they are entering into a 'Claimant Commitment' with the DWP that enhance their chances of employment, whilst still being achievable?
29. Are there any realistic opportunities to promote simple messages which may reduce the risk of sanctioning (also applicable to Equal Lives)?

Equal Lives

30. How can the increased emphasis on supporting ESA claimants to enhance their employability avoid the risk of increased sanctions that has attended increased JSA conditionality?
31. Are there any particular actions or the offering of particular advice which may reduce the risk of a person with a disability being sanctioned?

Council operations

32. What other approaches can be developed in partnership with DWP and others to ensure that JSA/ESA sanctions do not inadvertently compromise HB claims?

Appendix - Benefit sanctions in Norwich (notes)

Further to a June 2015 report from the New Policy Institute (NPI) on 'The rise of sanctioning in Great Britain'¹, this paper looks at the statistical evidence on the prevalence of benefits sanctions in Norwich. It concentrates primarily on the sanctioning of claimants of Job Seekers Allowance (JSA) as these make up the vast majority of sanctions². All data are sourced from the DWP's 'Stat-Xplore' database³ and are based on the residency of the claimant being in Norwich as opposed to including all claimants at Norwich Jobcentre.

For avoidance of doubt, the report refers only to the original decision made (which is to say the data do not include reviews, reconsiderations or appeals) and to the numbers of decisions made (as opposed to the numbers of individuals receiving a decision) unless otherwise stated.

This is not intended to be a comprehensive guide to the sanctions regime, but for clarity's sake there is a glossary of key terms provided as an appendix. It is worth also reading the referenced NPI report as background, although comparisons with that national picture are drawn out through this paper.

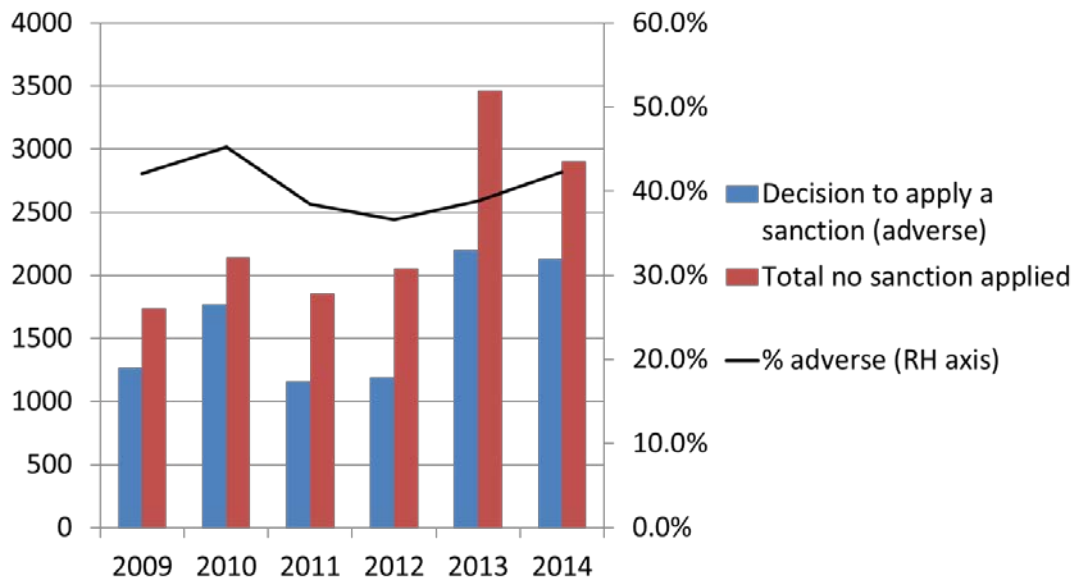
Trends in JSA sanctions

The first graph shows both the numbers of sanctions imposed in recent years, as well as the number of referrals made that did not result in a sanction being imposed either because it was an 'non-adverse decision' or the referral was cancelled or reserved (see glossary). It also shows (on the right-hand axis) the proportion of sanction referrals that resulted in an 'adverse' decision i.e. where a sanction was imposed.

¹ <http://npi.org.uk/publications/social-security-and-welfare-reform/rise-sanctioning-great-britain/>

² In 2014 there were approximately 2,000 JSA sanctions and 50 ESA sanctions

³ <https://stat-xplore.dwp.gov.uk/>

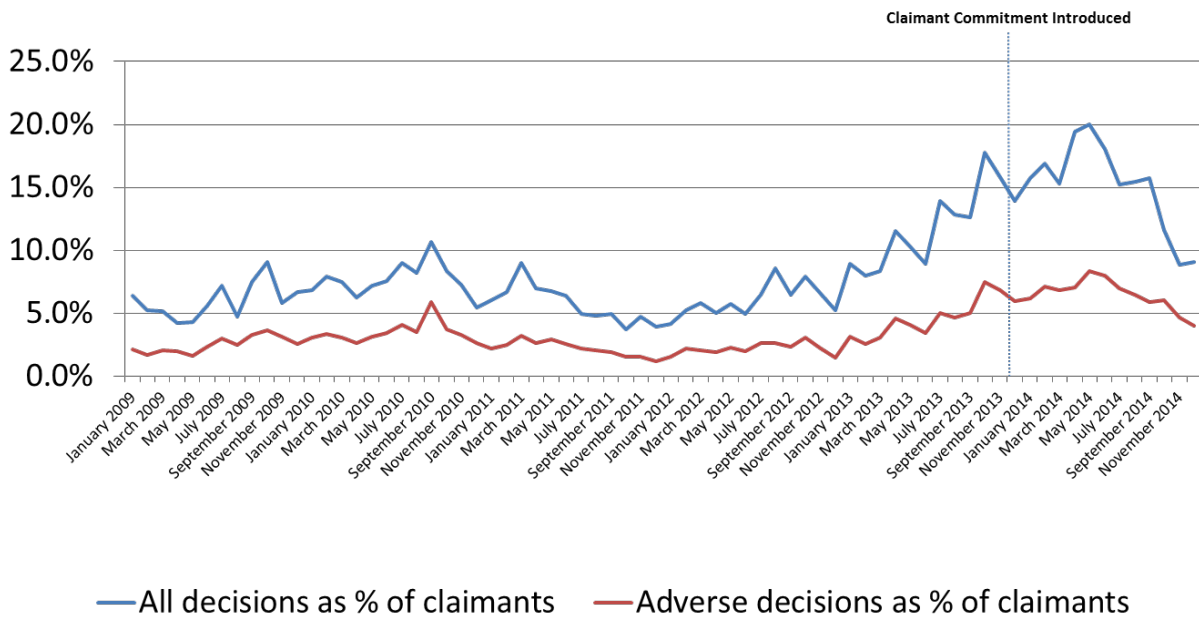


As can be seen from this graph, the total number of Norwich residents referred for a sanction decision increased markedly in 2013 before decreasing again in 2014, though the level remains above the scale of the years 2009-12. The number of these decisions that resulted in a sanction being applied also increased between 2012 and 2013 before decreasing slightly in 2014. This broad trend echoes the national picture, with NPI noting that ‘the large fall in the number of sanctions between 2013 and 2014 was almost entirely due to the reduction in the number of JSA claimants, not the system becoming less harsh.’ However, the reduction between 2013 and 2014 in Norwich was less marked than nationally.

The proportion of those referred for a sanction decision that resulted in a sanction remained fairly level over the period, staying with the range 35% - 45%. This looks to be lower than the national rate which was around 50% in 2014, meaning that Norwich residents were less likely to receive an adverse decision than on average if referred.

The sanction rate

The next graph shows the relationship between the total number of JSA claimants in Norwich per month since 2009 and the numbers of sanction referrals and decisions.



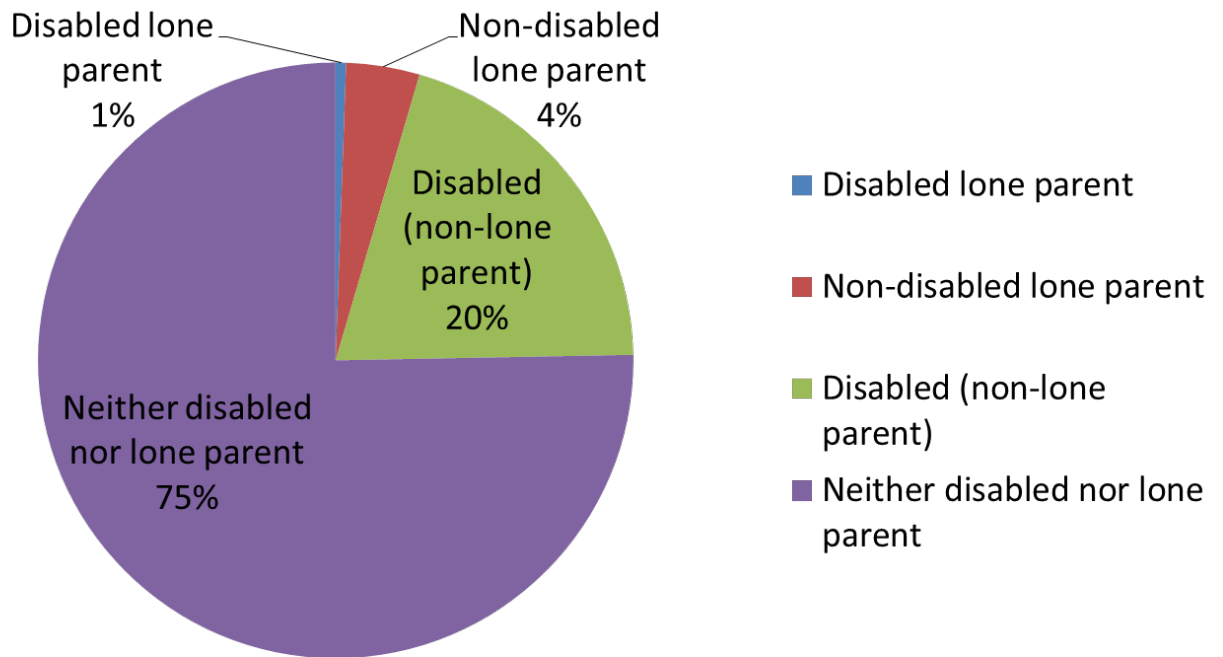
This shows that the likelihood of being referred for a sanction decision has increased over the period, with a slight spike in late 2010 and then another increase throughout 2013 to a peak in mid-2014, before again a drop-off over the rest of the year.

Although this is not directly comparable with the NPI report, we can still conclude that 'rate' of claimants in Norwich who are sanctioned over the last couple of years has been roughly in line with the national rate of around 5%. Again one can see as with the previous graph a high people number of people were referred for a sanction decision in 2013 and the first half of 2014, and as NPI observe 'while obviously not as bad as being referred for a sanction and then being sanctioned, referral itself is still a stressful matter.' However, it would appear that, locally at least, the rate that claimants are being referred for a sanction decision and then actually sanctioned has fallen off dramatically in the latter half of 2014.

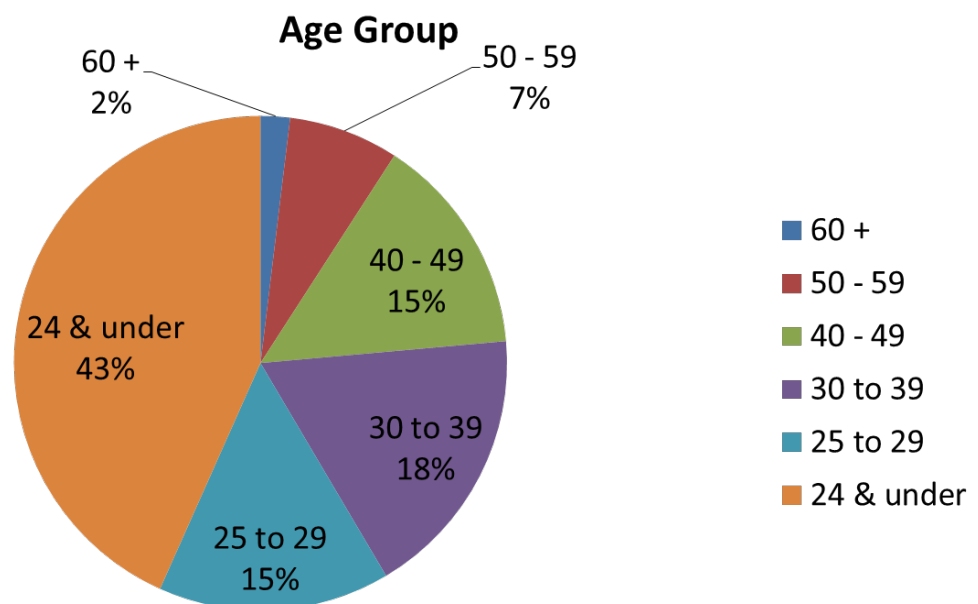
It may be that one cause of both the increase and subsequent decrease in referral and sanction rates was the introduction of the 'claimant commitment' which was rolled out in Norwich around December 2013. This is intended to make jobseekers more accountable for their efforts to find work. As well as a new process it signalled a change of culture for both DWP staff and claimants, and we can speculate that this took time to become embedded as a way of working and that more people fell short of the new requirements until they became accustomed to the increased conditionality.

Who is being sanctioned?

Two charts give us a bit of detail of who was actually sanctioned in 2014. The first looks at the disabled status and lone parent status of claimants, which is very similar to the national picture:



The second looks at the age profile of those sanctioned.



This shows quite clearly that claimants aged 18-24 are disproportionately likely to be sanctioned, with 43% of all adverse sanctions being applied to that group, whereas on average in 2014 they only made up 24% of the claimant count. In a 2014 report⁴, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation suggested various reasons for this trend, but that it is consistent with international evidence on the issue.

⁴ <http://www.jrf.org.uk/sites/files/jrf/Welfare-conditionality-UK-Summary.pdf>

We have looked at data on the ethnicity of those being sanctioned, but the numbers involved were too low to tell us anything meaningful. Similarly, there was nothing significant to be derived from gender profile.

Although we do not have access to data on the housing status of those being sanctioned locally, Homeless Link undertook research in 2013 that showed that nationally '31% of homeless people on Jobseekers Allowance (JSA) had been sanctioned, compared to just 3% of typical claimants'⁵

Why are people being sanctioned?

As with the national picture, there were three main reasons for Norwich residents to have a sanction applied in 2014, namely:

- Failure to participate in a scheme for assisting person to obtain employment (such as Work Programme) without good reason (36%)
- Not actively seeking employment (33.1%)
- Failure to attend or failure to participate in an adviser interview without good reason (16.5%)

Of these, the first referral reason is least likely to end in a sanction being applied with only 1 in 4 referrals resulting in a sanction and over half the referrals being cancelled. We understand that this is due to the lack of discretion granted to Work Programme providers about whether they refer participants for a sanction decision in the event of being late, for example. Conversely, a sanction was applied around 87% of the time if referred for a decision for 'not actively seeking work' in 2014. It may therefore be possible to conclude that failure to demonstrate "actively seeking work" significantly increases the chance of being sanctioned than infraction of Work Programme or similar scheme rules.

In terms of likelihood of being sanctioned, there was a difference in 2014 between stages of the decision-making process. At the original decision stage, 42% of referrals resulted in adverse decisions, whereas at decision review this fell to 21%, rose 68% at mandatory reconsideration and further to 100% at appeal (although there were only 7 appeals on sanction decisions). This indicates that there is a good case for asking for a decision to be reviewed, but less likelihood of a positive outcome for the claimant if it goes to mandatory reconsideration or appeal. Consequently receiving appropriate advice could help people who have been sanctioned to decide what action to take.

Level of sanctions

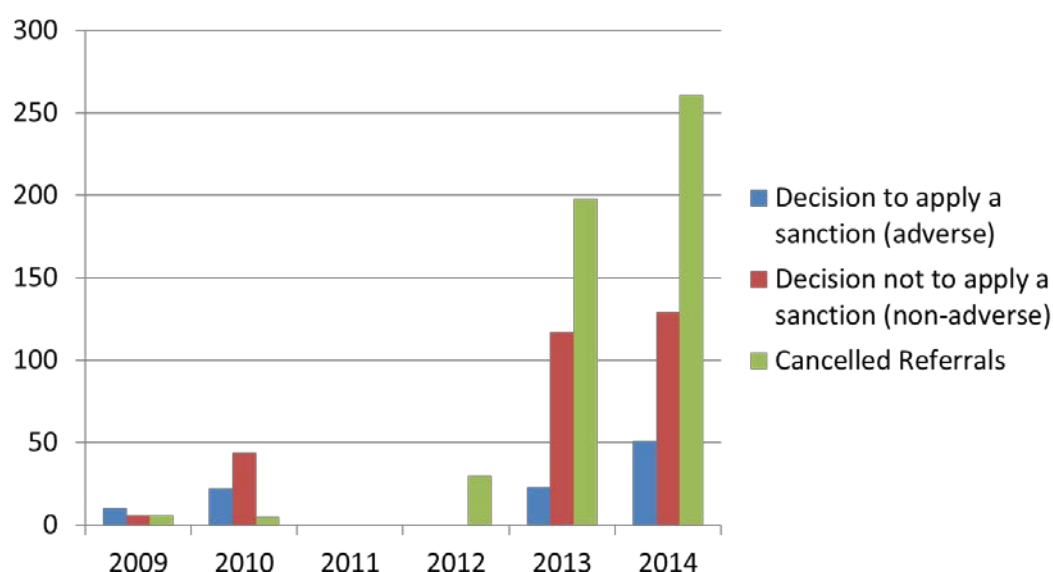
Owing to the change of sanctions regime in October 2012, it is difficult to derive much meaningful information on trends over time, but between 2013 and 2014 there was a decrease in the proportion of 'lower-level' sanctions imposed in Norwich and

⁵ <http://www.homeless.org.uk/connect/news/2013/sep/23/benefit-sanctions-hitting-homeless-people-hardest-0>

an increase in intermediate level sanctions. Although in practical terms both these levels of sanction result in losing benefit for between 4 and 13 weeks, intermediate level sanctions also involve the JSA claim being closed. Higher level sanctions can result in losing benefit for between 13 and 152 weeks; there were around 200 higher level sanctions (or 10% of all sanctions) imposed in Norwich in both 2013 and 2014.

ESA sanctions

The next graph gives an overview of ESA sanctions over recent years:



As can be seen, numbers of Norwich ESA claimants referred for a sanction decision and ultimately sanctioned remain low relative to JSA, albeit having increased from almost nothing in 2011 and 2012, as was the case nationally. There are quite a high proportion of referrals that are cancelled before a decision is made and a very small number of actual sanctions imposed (51 in 2014). As the volumes are so low, there is very little meaningful analysis to be undertaken. At a national level NPI note that 'around 2% of the stock is sanctioned on average each month.'

Unanswered questions

The data that we have looked at above can tell us a certain amount about the patterns and prevalence of sanctions, but it cannot tell us about a series of issues that are raised by the regime. The first of these is that we cannot tell what the impact of those sanctions has been. National evidence suggests a number of possible impacts:

- The Work and Pensions Committee identified in their report on sanctions⁶ that 'there is clear evidence that benefit sanctions tend to increase exits from benefits—known as benefit off-flow' but raised questions about whether this was necessarily people moving into employment, and if so, what the quality of

⁶ <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201415/cmselect/cmworpen/814/81402.htm>

that employment was. There is some anecdotal evidence locally and nationally that some more vulnerable people are disengaging from the system, as they struggle to navigate the conditionality and sanctions regime

- Homeless Link found in their 2013 research (referenced above) that there were a number of impacts on homeless people, including accommodation problems, food poverty, increased debt, 'survival crime' and anxiety
- Again, the Work and Pensions Committee noted that there had been 'largely qualitative evidence that benefit sanctions were a significant contributory factor to a recent rise in referrals to voluntary sector food aid', but local data does not give us a robust evidence base from which to draw this conclusion
- The Oakley Review of sanctions⁷ found evidence that individuals who have been sanctioned for JSA also have inadvertently had their Housing Benefit claim suspended, which then could lead to increased arrears, and even loss of accommodation on occasion. This has happened in Norwich, partly due to the quality of information received from DWP when an individual has been sanctioned. In practice notification is received from the DWP that JSA entitlement has ended and therefore HB is suspended and the claimant written to. In the event of further contact not being received HB is cancelled.

The other question that is raised is about the future of sanctions. There appears to have been a decrease since mid-2014 in the rate and number of referrals and sanctions being applied, which may mean that this is an issue that is declining in significance. However, we have yet to see Universal Credit rolled out in Norwich, which means a change of system for the DWP and claimants, albeit mirroring the 'claimant commitment' regime already instituted under JSA.

The more distant horizon is that when the current Working Tax Credit system is integrated into Universal Credit, then this will mean the advent of 'in-work' conditionality i.e. that working claimants will not just have to meet the existing financial eligibility criteria, but will also be subject to conditions around increasing or improving their employment, depending on their circumstances. This means that individuals and households who are not habituated to conditionality will have to navigate this for the first time, with all the attendant risk of sanctioning, described by NPI as 'an alarming prospect'.

⁷ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/335144/jsa-sanctions-independent-review.pdf

Glossary

Original: An original decision is made by a decision maker following a referral by a Jobcentre Plus or employment programme staff member.

Decision review: An explanation of a sanction decision can be made by the claimant, or the claimant's representative; or Jobcentre Plus staff acting on behalf of the Secretary of State. This explanation may identify circumstances which may lead to a revised decision.

Mandatory Reconsideration: This is a formal application for a revision of a sanction decision. Mandatory reconsiderations were introduced in 28th October 2013.

Appealed: A claimant can appeal a decision notified. Prior to 28th October 2013, a claimant could appeal at any time (within a time limit) following the issue of either an original or reconsidered decision. From 28th October 2013, a claimant cannot appeal against a decision until they have requested a mandatory reconsideration from the Department for Work and Pensions and received a mandatory reconsideration notice. An appeal is heard by Her Majesty's Court and Tribunal Service (HMCTS)

Decision not to apply a sanction (Non-Adverse): this a decision found in favour of the claimant, i.e. a sanction or disallowance is not applied. A non-adverse decision can be made at the original decision making point, at reconsideration, or on appeal.

Decision to apply a sanction (Adverse): this a decision found against the claimant, i.e. a sanction or disallowance is applied. An adverse decision can be made at the original decision making point, at reconsideration, or on appeal.

Reserved Decisions: a reserved decision is where a sanction would be appropriate but cannot be imposed because the claimant does not have a current claim to JSA. A case would be re-referred if the claimant reclaims JSA within the period of the reserved decision.

Cancelled Referrals: A cancelled decision can occur in specific circumstances:

(a) the claimant stops claiming before they actually committed the sanctionable failure. For example, if a claimant failed to participate with the Work Programme scheme on 25 October 2012, the referral would be cancelled if the claimant ended their claim prior to 25 October.

(b) the claimant has left employment voluntarily or through misconduct, but the period of employment in doubt did not immediately precede their JSA claim.

(c) there has been no response, within 10 calendar days, to an enquiry sent to the Jobcentre and it is not possible to obtain the information required from another source.

Norwich City Council
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
ITEM 9

REPORT for meeting to be held on 16 July 2015

**Housing benefits and council tax reduction scheme claims
processing**

Summary: The scrutiny committee has asked for information to address the performance levels towards improving the average processing time for new housing benefit and council tax reduction scheme claims.

A presentation will be made on 16 July 2015 detailing the improvement in processing times and future plans for continuous improvement.

Conclusions: The current level of performance reported for processing new claims for housing benefit and council tax reduction scheme for 2014/15 was 23.7 days against a target of 21 days. Performance has significantly improved and will continue to improve in to 2015/16.

Recommendation: Performance continues to be managed through the quarterly reporting process.

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