

Cabinet

17:30 to 18:11

Wednesday, 02 April 2025

Present: Councillors Stonard (Leader), Hampton (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for A Climate Responsive Norwich), Giles (Cabinet Member for A Fairer Norwich), Harper (Cabinet Member for Major Projects), Jones (Cabinet Member for Housing), Kendrick (Cabinet Member for An Open and Modern Council) and Kidman (Cabinet Member for A Prosperous Norwich).

Apologies: Councillor Packer

In attendance: Councillor Galvin (Leader of the Green Group)

1. Declarations of Interest

Councillor Stonard declared a registerable interest in item 6 – UK Shared Prosperity Fund extension as he was the chair of NR5 projects which had received funding from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund however he had not been involved in the decision to award funding and the report was to note the projects that had been awarded funding.

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 5 March 2025 and of the extraordinary meeting held on 19 March 2025.

5. Norfolk and Suffolk devolution consultation – Norwich City Council response

The Leader of the Council presented the report. The Government was consulting on the establishment of a Mayoral Combined County Authority (MCCA) for Norfolk and Suffolk. The Secretary of State would determine whether this arrangement would improve social, economic and environmental wellbeing, delivery effective and convenient local government

and reflect local identities and interests. If the Secretary of State agreed that the MCCA would deliver this then a Mayoral election would be held in May 2026.

The City Council was supportive in principle of the MCCA, and the opportunities devolution would bring. This benefits for Norwich would depend on the governance arrangements and ensuring that local decision-making influence was secured. The Council was therefore asking the Government to agree that the number of non-constituent members should be a minimum of one seat for each district, city and borough council across both counties to ensure representation for rural, urban and coastal areas and to grant them voting rights on matters directly impacting their areas. The Council's response highlighted that devolution would amplify the potential for Greater Norwich as an urban centre to driver regional and nation growth as well as raising living standards. Working across the broader geographical area would offer the opportunity to strengthen environmental outcomes and strategic planning.

Councillor Galvin asked the following question:

"We are glad that the scrutiny committee recommendation to add the word 'potential' was taken up on page 14 regarding our consultation response in the wording 'North sea hydrocarbon transition, carbon capture, usage and storage (CCUS), hydrogen, solar energy and nuclear newbuild. The region is well-placed to drive clean energy innovation' as assumptions are made about CCUS and nuclear that they are somehow driving clean energy innovation, when in fact they are diverting funding away from known, proven, cheaper renewable technologies which would be secure, enhance our economy and provide a safe and clean energy future. Would the Councillor Stonard agree with me that the vastly expensive and unproven technologies of carbon capture and storage, and nuclear are not the future for Norfolk's energy sector?"

The Leader of the Council gave the following response:

"The Council acknowledges that market ready renewable energy technologies must take primacy over evolving technologies, in our response to the climate crises. The Council actively supports the renewables sector such as by procuring 100% renewable energy for its operations, which it has done for many years. But renewable technologies have not always been low cost. The cost of renewable energy has greatly reduced over the last two decades due to the support shown by government and consumers alike, which have enabled the technology to mature, and to become market ready and cost effective. Currently, our target is to achieve net zero emissions by 2045 and in the future it's possible that we will need to actively remove emissions from the atmosphere at a rate that can't be delivered by ecosystem solutions alone. For these reasons, the council Considers it vital to keep our future technology options open. As we move into an era defined by the climate emergency, our region must be able to manage the resulting uncertainties, risks and opportunities, to ensure communities remain resilient."

In response to Councillor Galvin's supplementary question the Leader of the Council said that carbon capture, usage and storage would only be considered after all other possibilities had been exhausted.

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

RESOLVED, unanimously, to:

- 1) Agree the responses to the recommendations made by the Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 20 March 2025 as they appear in Appendix C for the reasons cited.
- 2) Approve Norwich City Council's response to the Government consultation on Norfolk and Suffolk devolution plans, as at Appendix A, for submission to the Government by the consultation closing date of 13 April 2025.

6. UK Shared Prosperity Fund extension

The Cabinet Member for A Fairer Norwich presented the report. He was pleased to report that the Council had been awarded an extension of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) from the Government. This would help to support communities and local business opportunities. Appendix D to the report detailed the way in which the funding had been allocated based on the UKSPF priorities. This included projects and programmes related to cleanliness and safety of residents, funding to projects to prevent homelessness and support for the wellbeing of residents. Funding had also been allocated to projects to support young people into employment and to provide support and advice for small and start-up businesses in Norwich. He thanked the programme manager, councillors and partner organisations for the work in developing the investment plan. The Council would continue to evaluate the progress the programme of investment.

Councillor Galvin asked the following question:

"It is good to see this funding going to local groups and thanks to officers for subsequently on request providing the amounts given out to Love Norwich and community buildings, which are not in the papers published. Transparency is very important in this area. We as a council are seemingly not in compliance with the transparency code (we have not been publishing details of all grants as we should have since 2019, and officers have been alerted to this and are aware of the risks). How can the public be assured that the money is being distributed in line with best practice in terms of value for money, community impact and avoiding conflicts of interest, and what ongoing evaluation is being done on the impacts?"

The Cabinet Member for A Fairer Norwich gave the following response:

"If I address the transparency issue first.

I agree that transparency is very important. The impact across the UKSPF programme has been vast and these figures were not included initially as officers were trying to keep the report concise. These figures were provided to you by officers almost immediately on request earlier this week.

I can confirm that the figures for these grants for 2023-2024 have previously been published on our website in accordance with the transparency code. They can be found in the community grants section.

Those awarded in 2024-2025 will be updated in due course in line with our obligations.

Turning to the important issue of the grants and their impact.

The impact of the grants has been substantial, fostering stronger community ties, promoting environmental stewardship, and enhancing local spaces. By empowering volunteers and ensuring equitable access to resources, these grants have successfully addressed local issues and created lasting positive change in the communities they serve.

The balance between monitoring obligations and accessibility has been carefully managed. While successful applicants are required to provide end of project reports, the whole process has been designed to be straightforward and supportive. This ensures that small community groups and charities can access the grants without being overwhelmed by administrative burdens. By maintaining this balance, the small grants have proven to be an effective tool for community development and engagement.

Although we are still in the early stages of evaluating the UKSPF, initial findings indicate that the grants and support provided by the community enabling team are making a significant positive impact. By offering time and space for conversations, the team helps individuals explore their ambitions and connect with each other. This wrap-around support at the community level is crucial for local groups to develop and grow, fostering a sense of unity and shared purpose. The full evaluation will be published on its completion.”

Councillor Galvin asked as a supplementary question whether the grants given to Voluntary, Community, and Social Enterprise sector organisations were published. In response the Cabinet Member for A Fairer Norwich confirmed that these had been published and that he would send the link to where they had been published.

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

RESOLVED, unanimously, to note the contents of the report, UK Shared Prosperity Fund extension.

7. Delegated authority to award the main contract for the enabling works at Mile Cross depot site for the development of 67 new dwellings

The Cabinet Member for Housing presented the report. She was pleased to bring forward the next steps for the Mile Cross depot site. This had been a complex site to address as significant work had been required to decontaminate the ground. The site remediation had where possible reused material. The site had been reviewed prior to progressing and it had been split between two packages. This contract followed from the remediation works and was to prepare the site in advance of development with a number of works including highways. The Council was currently undergoing a tender process, which would allow the site to be unlocked with use of Right-to-Buy receipts. As part of the Council’s commitment the roads would be named after women from Norwich that had made a contribution to the city. Results from the tendering process were due imminently and the decision to delegate authority to award the contract would enable the site to progress as soon as it was in place.

Councillor Galvin asked the following question:

“£1m was awarded by Government in 2018 to unlock this site, closed since 2017. How can the public be assured that everything possible is being done to speed up the development of this site when it has been sitting empty for eight years and they could rightly ask what the

delays have been and continue to be. When does Councillor Jones expect to see the houses built and keys handed over?"

The Cabinet Member for Housing gave the following response:

"Between 2018 – 2020 works were undertaken to remove the light industrial buildings. During 2020 - 2021 The Housing Delivery Team commenced technical studies to understand the condition of the site. A planning application was compiled between 2020-2021 for the site remediation as it was established that the ground conditions were extremely complex.

In 2022 a contract was awarded for the ground to be remediated which was completed in 2023. During this period a planning application was compiled for phase 1 of the main development works and submitted in February of 2024. Due to the site's complexities, and to mitigate risk, the council undertook a design review to ensure the proposed scheme was fit for purpose. Subsequently a planning decision notice was issued in November 2024. During this time, tender documentation was compiled ready for issuing to commence works at the earliest opportunity following planning determination.

To speed up a commencement on site, it was decided to break the contract into two elements; 1. an enabling works package, 2. the main contract works. The Housing Delivery Team worked closely with the planning officer to ensure the wording of the planning conditions did not hinder the commencement of works within the enabling package to be undertaken to ensure works can begin.

The required information to discharge the affected pre-commencement conditions has already been submitted to planning.

The Housing Delivery Team have been proactive in undertaking other works that have been able to commence, such as the decanting of the garages at Vale Green, party wall surveys, asbestos surveys, security fencing and consultations and assessment with utility providers ensuring once the tender evaluation for the contract award is concluded an immediate start on site can be made.

Subject to approval, the enabling works will commence and complete within 2025.

The tender documentation has been produced for the main contract works. Once a route to market has been agreed (which is currently being determined) the tender will be released with the aim to award a contract within Q2 of this financial year. This would see a start on site during Q3 of 2025, with the first sectional completion of houses being handed over to the HRA by December 2026."

In response to Councillor Galvin's supplementary question the Cabinet Member for Housing confirmed that the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) fund needed to balance the needs between existing tenants and building new properties. There was not a specific number of employees that worked on building new homes as employees worked across several areas including new builds and existing stock. Due the complexity of the site most private sector developers likely would not have developed the site. The Council also needed to ensure that investment into the site ensured that it was paid for within the life of the HRA business plan to ensure that the right support was available in the right way. She was confident that the site would be delivered.

The Cabinet Member for Housing moved and the Cabinet Member for Major Projects seconded the recommendations as set out in the report.

RESOLVED, unanimously, to delegate the authority to award the main contract for the enabling works at Mile Cross former depot site for the development of 67 new dwellings to the Executive Director of Communities and Housing, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing and the Cabinet Member for An Open and Modern Council following the completion of a formal tender process at a contract value of approximately £2,400,000.00.

8. Exclusion of the Press and Public

RESOLVED to exclude the press and public from the meeting during consideration of items *9 (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.

***9. Managing Assets (Housing) (Para 3)**

The Cabinet Member for Housing presented the report. She highlighted that the named sites would be disposed of to enable a registered housing provider to deliver affordable housing within the city.

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

RESOLVED, unanimously, to approve the disposal of the named sites in order to enable new affordable housing for the city.

CHAIR