NORWICH
City Council

Scrutiny committee

Date: **Thursday, 16 March 2023**
Time: **16:30**
Venue: **Mancroft room City Hall, St Peters Street, Norwich, NR2 1NH**

All group pre-meeting briefing – 16:00

This is for members only and is not part of the formal scrutiny committee 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 actual meeting. The public will not be given access to the committee room before 16:30.

Committee members:

Councillors:
Wright (Chair)
Brociek-Coulton (Vice chair)
Carlo
Driver
Fulton-McAlister (M)
Galvin
Huntley
Osborn
Padda
Stutely
Thomas (Va)
Thomas (Vi)
Young

For further information please contact:

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

IN TRAN
communication for all

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

Page nos

1 Apologies

To receive apologies for absence.

2 Declarations of interest

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

3 Minutes **5 - 44**

To approve the accuracy of the minutes of the informal meeting held on 19 January 2023 and the ordinary meeting on 2 February 2023.

4 Scrutiny Committee Work Programme 2022-23 **45 - 54**

Purpose - To consider the scrutiny committee work programme 2022-23.

5 Update from the NHOSC representative (verbal update)

To consider a verbal update from the council's representative on the Norfolk Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 19 January 2023.

6 Scrutiny review of welcoming Refugees and Asylum Seekers to Norwich and overcoming obstacles to their smooth integration **55 - 68**

Purpose - To update the scrutiny committee on the work undertaken to review the welcome of refugees and asylum seekers to Norwich, and how obstacles to their smooth intergration can be overcome.

7 Recommendations on Green Financing item

To consider recommendations following the item on Green Financing heard at the meeting on 19 January 2023.

Date of publication**: Wednesday, 08 March 2023**

NORWICH City Council

Item 3

MINUTES

Scrutiny Committee

Informal Meeting

16:30 to 18:50 **19 January 2023**

Present: Councillors Brociek-Coulton (vice chair) (in the chair), Carlo, Driver, Galvin, Huntley, Osborn, Padda, Stutely, Thomas (Va), Thomas (Vi) and Young

Apologies: Councillors Fulton-McAlister (M) and Wright

(Also present Councillors Hampton, cabinet member for climate change and digital inclusion, Kendrick, cabinet member for resources and Waters, leader of the council).

1. Declarations of interest

Councillors Osborn and Galvin declared an other interest in relation to item 2 (below) in that they worked for MCS charitable foundation to which the Green Finance Institute had applied for funding.

2. Green Financing

The vice-chair welcomed Matt Ferretti, head of partnerships for the Green Finance Institute (GFI). The head of partnerships provided a presentation to members which is appended to these minutes and then took questions.

In response to a member question the head of partnerships advised that the GFI's solutions would work with any size of council and the organisation was learning through the process of working with councils. The GFI were a small organisation with approximately 30 staff and when working with a local authority would work remotely and face to face depending on need and capacity.

The head of partnerships advised that all GFI's solutions were targeted at the able to pay residential market as this offered a real chance to progress energy efficiency. It was for councils to determine their retrofit strategies but the GFI could look at how to unlock finances to progress such a strategy.

In response to member questions in relation to Local Climate Bonds, the head of partnerships advised that these were not one off funding mechanisms but could be used as a tool for future growth. As investor confidence in the product increased there was potential to raise significant capital to fund projects. He noted too that getting loans from the Public Works Loan Board (PWLB) could become more challenging over time.

In response to a member question the head of partnerships advised of the six Local Climate Bonds (LCBs) established to date only one did not achieve its funding target largely because the neighbouring authority was engaged in the same process. If the target was not reached the monies were still available for use. Local citizens were the primary drivers of funds but ethical investors nationwide also sought to invest in LCBs. Interest rates were competitive but it was to be noted that local investment was primarily driven by a desire to invest in the local area, 10% of investors chose to forgo their investment interest payments.

LCBs were essentially crowd funded loans to the local authority. The first LCB would involve work to promote the product locally and raise awareness. In terms of the GFI's engagement with a local authority launching a LCB the GFI's communications team worked alongside the council's communication team.

In response to a member question the head of partnerships advised that council's had to have a proposition ready to go in terms of what was being offered and the GFI could then come onboard to consider how to finance the schemes. LCBs were a simple proposition to launch and could be launched almost in isolation. There were no criteria in terms of a project being a new or existing one only that it was a 'green' project. It was possible to take an existing agreed project and swap out the planned funding to a LCB.

In terms of what checks were completed to deter money laundering the GFI worked with Abundance Investment who had a digital crowd funding platform, they were FCA registered and therefore had to conduct similar checks to a bank to verify a customer.

A member asked a question in relation to property linked finance (PLF). The head of partnerships agreed this had enormous potential and the GFI were working on developing a product. The proposition was outlined and a target operating model was being developed, the risk model, the likelihood of credit default would determine cost. The head of partnerships hoped the GFI would have a target operating definition by mid 2023 to take through regulators in order to get a pilot off the ground in the next 18 months.

The head of partnerships confirmed that PLFs would be available to landlords, the GFI were currently considering if the first pilot scheme would be in the commercial or residential sector. In terms of whether homeowners could repay any PLF early this was still to be established but it was to be noted that if there was the possibility for early repayment it would not present as good an investment for investors. PLFs would not be secured against a property unlike mortgages.

In terms of the effect of energy efficient measures on house values, properties which were retrofitted were in greater demand and held their values in the depressed market better.

In response to a member the environmental strategy manager advised that in terms of progress on the heat networks project a heat map had been produced and initial results showed the potential for heat networks in the city. He advised that the council were having conversations with the GFI on how to apply their products in Norwich as part of the Environmental Action Plan. An initial report detailing this work

would be coming to the Climate and Environment Emergency Executive Panel (CEEEP) for consideration.

Members discussed and agreed that recommendations on this item would be best considered after the CEEEP meeting on 14 February 2023. Members thanked the head of partnerships for attending the meeting.

3. Draft Equality Information report

Councillor Waters, leader of the council introduced the item. He emphasised that the council was committed to diversity and tackling inequality. The report focussed on the work the council was doing alone and with partners to challenge inequality in the city.

The senior strategy officer provided a presentation on the Draft Equality Information report to members which is appended to these minutes.

The neighbourhood and community enabling manager provided examples of work the communities team had been undertaking to challenge inequalities in the city. The council had helped to establish social supermarkets in the city, these reduced pressure on foodbanks, reduced waste and provided a level of dignity to the shopper. There were currently three social supermarkets in the city with two in development the council provided the space for two of the current projects for free.

The neighbourhood and community enabling manager detailed the work of the Community Conversations project. The project took a long term holistic approach to increasing community resilience. There were six community connectors hosted by Voluntary Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector organisations and three community conversations officers hosted by the council. The officers had conversations with people in the local community to establish what their concerns were this had resulted in the establishment of a social supermarket in Mile Cross as need was recognised. The project had also linked VCSE organisations that wanted to do outreach work with community groups.

The neighbourhood and community enabling manager detailed an example where conversation officers had spoken to a homeless and signposted him to a foodbank where advice was provided by Shelter. The man attended the foodbank and spoke to the advisor from Shelter, this resulted in him going on a four week trial at a small holding which provided accommodation.

The head of HR and organisational development provided information regarding the diversity of the council's workforce. A report was considered at cabinet in March 2021 entitled improving the diversity of the council's workforce which highlighted that the council's workforce did not reflect the community it served. The report included an action plan and strategy detailing how workforce diversity in relation to BAMEs would be increased. Data from December 2020 showed that 3.4% of the council's workforce came from BAME communities and as of March 2022 this had increased to 9%.

This work was continuing with the training provided to the workforce being relaunched to ensure the council was an inclusive employer. A new recruitment

portal had been launched which would monitor if there were issues to work on in terms of recruitment and selection and its impact on diversity. The council were working with its recruitment partners to focus on diversity and inclusion too.

In terms of protected characteristics reflected in the workforce this remained stable, work was ongoing to encourage employees to record protected characteristics. The age profile of the workforce did not reflect the local community with Norwich being a young city. Measures such as apprenticeships and engagement with schools would increase this demographic. Work on the council's culture had started with a culture programme launched in May 22 and a survey which asked the workforce where the future culture should be. It was hoped that a new set of values and behaviours would be signed off shortly which would underpin recruitment practice.

The vice chair noted that it was good to see the impact of the menopause being acknowledged with a recent menopause café being held at city hall.

In response to a member question the neighbourhood and community enabling manager advised that social supermarkets (SSs) eased the pressure on foodbanks and provided a level of dignity and choice to the shopper. In terms of an exit strategy there would need to be an improvement in the wider social economic situation before this could be considered. He highlighted that the new SS on Hall Rd had garnered 1,300 new registrations in its first month of operating.

A member asked if the social economic background of the workforce was recorded and if this could be included in the Equality Information Report next year. Further what work had been undertaken to look at contextual recruitment where lived experience was given weight rather than qualifications. The head of HR and organisational development advised that work was currently ongoing to consider how the social economic background of employees could be plotted. In terms of practices which excluded people again this was ongoing and when service reviews were conducted job descriptions were reviewed to see if all aspects were required.

A member asked that in terms of the Reducing Inequality Target Areas (RITAs) and Community Conversations how was success measured. The neighbourhood and community enabling manager advised in terms of Community Conversations that a summary of conversations was recorded with signposting and outcomes achieved recorded also. Going forward it was hoped that ripple effect mapping would be used. As regards RITAs, the Norfolk Office of Data and Analytics (NODA) had run updated data sets on the areas covered but it would take time to see the impact of work.

A member asked what the implications of Norwich being a young city were on equality policy, did older people feel left behind and what were the implications of the social economic position of young people. The senior strategy officer advised that targeted engagement with these groups took place and fed into the equality action plan.

In response to a member question the senior strategy officer advised that flags which recorded an individual's vulnerability were shared with contractors delivering council services. She noted that there was a wider strategic point in recognising and understanding the needs of residents who were neurodiverse providing appropriate support and improving training to front line staff.

Members concluded by considering recommendations and following discussion it was **RESOLVED** to:

1) Ask officers to ensure that flags indicating a customer's vulnerability or extra needs are shared with the council's contractors;

2) Ask the senior strategy officer to include a strand in the next Equality Information report on flags and what they denote in terms of equalities data;

3) Ask the neighbourhood and community enabling manager to provide a report to scrutiny committee detailing the objectives of the RITAs and the progress made to meeting them;

4) Ask the head of HR and organisational development to ensure that the soc-economic background of employees was recorded; and

5) Ask the senior strategy officer to include trend-based reporting in the Equality Information report in order that year on year comparisons can be made.

4. Scrutiny Committee work programme 2022-23

Members discussed the work programme and in particular the terms of reference (ToR) for the 'welcoming immigrants, refugees and asylum-seekers to Norwich' topic. Members were keen to capture the lived experience of refugees and asylum seekers and suggested the survey included with the ToR should be targeted at this group rather than the organisations working with them. Further it would be ideal to ask participants to have input into the questions in order that they be co produced, could the survey be shared with Norwich City of Sanctuary to get their thoughts. Members suggested that committee visit a community organisation to hold an in person session and that refugees and asylum seekers be invited into City Hall too.

The Monitoring Officer advised the survey was designed for organisations in order to allow input across the full range of bodies that supported refugees and asylum seekers. Officers would look to see if arrangements could be made in the timeframe but an interim report might have to come to March committee.

RESOLVED to:

1) Ask the committee officer to amend the terms of reference for 'welcoming immigrants, refugees and asylum-seeker to Norwich' to include a survey targeted at participants rather than community groups;

2) Ask the committee officer to liaise with organisations and community groups working with immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers to arrange a visit for committee members to speak to participants; and

3) Ask the committee officer to arrange for immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers to be invited to city hall to speak to committee.

CHAIR

Green Finance Institute

Green Finance Institute

Norwich Council Scrutiny Committee

19 January 2023

About us

GFI Solutions Limited
A Green Finance Institute company

Channeling global finance **into local solutions**

About us

- GFI was established in 2019 following a key policy recommendation made to the UK Government as a not-for-profit company
- An independent, commercially focused organisation, backed by Government and led by bankers
- The UK's principal interface between the public and private sectors
- Bringing together global experts and practitioners to identify and unlock barriers to deploy capital at pace and scale towards real-economy outcomes
- Designing, developing and launching portfolios of scalable financial solutions that accelerate sector-specific transitions to a low-carbon future
- GFI Solutions was established in 2022 as the commercial arm of the organisation, and all activities and profits generated are used to further GFI objectives

Our **vision**

A greener future made possible by finance

Our **mission**

To accelerate the transition to a clean, resilient and environmentally sustainable economy by channelling capital at pace and scale towards real-economy outcomes that will create jobs and increase prosperity for all.

What **the Green Finance Institute does**

Financing **Green**

Mobilising public and private finance for clean and resilient growth

- Focusing on financing real-economy transitions by sector
- Bringing together and leading coalitions of global experts and practitioners
- Identifying the barriers to investment
- Fostering the development of innovative financial mechanisms
- Incubating new ventures with foundations and other strategic partners worldwide
- Current focus areas include buildings, road transport and nature.

Greening **Finance**

Supporting the greening of the financial system

- Collaborating with financial regulators, policymakers, trade bodies, think tanks and multilateral organisations
- Raising awareness of the financial sector's ambitions and achievements in green finance through communications, events and engagement programmes

Knowledge **Exchange**

Building green finance skills and capabilities

- Supporting the UK Government's diplomatic and trade efforts through education, training and advisory work
- Sharing international learning and best practice

Climate Finance for Local Authorities

Why could local authorities fail to fund their net-zero ambitions?

Figure 1: Finance Available to Local Authorities (expressed in millions of £, as of March 2022)

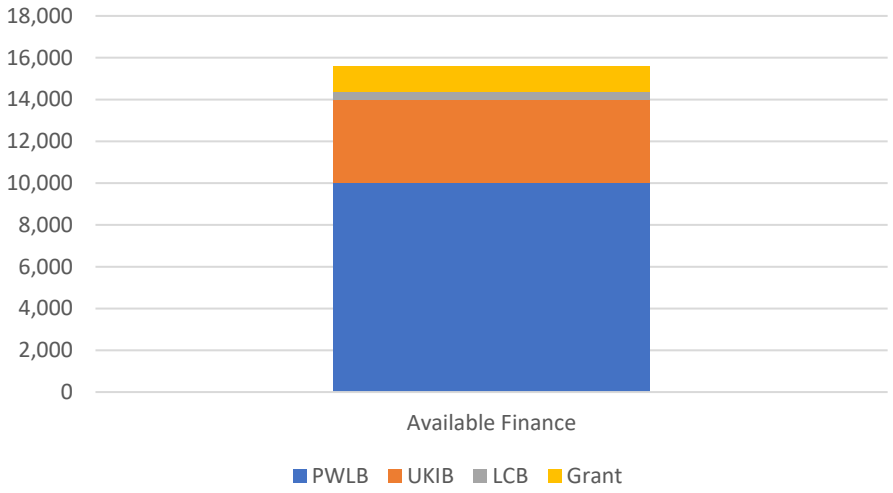
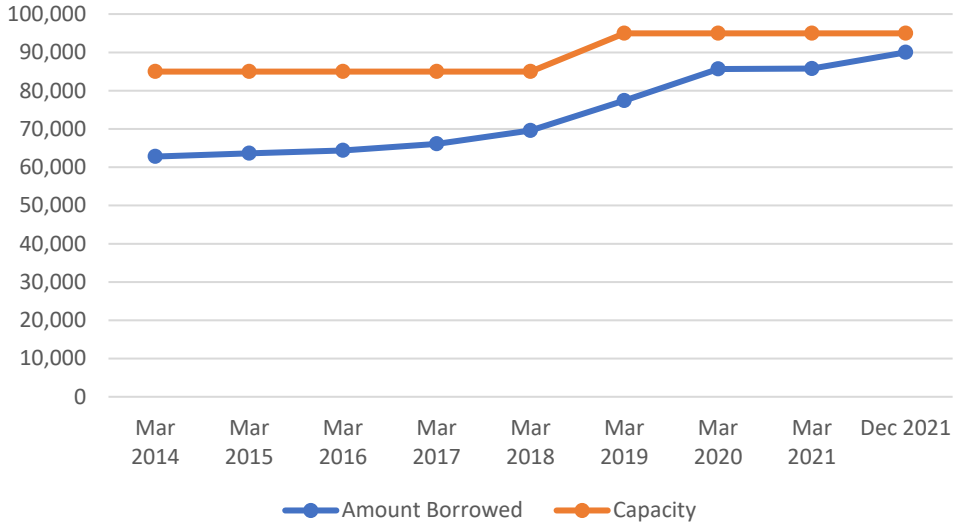


Figure 2: PWLB Total Borrowed vs Capacity (£ million)



The Climate Change Committee estimates that reaching net-zero by 2050 will cost the UK £1.4 trillion, a third of which is expected to be public capital

As the figures above suggest, only a fraction of this capital is available to local authorities. The Public Work's Loan Board, which local authorities heavily rely on, is quickly reaching its capacity. Our contact at UKIB suggests that, from a treasury perspective, they cannot simply continue to increase this capacity!

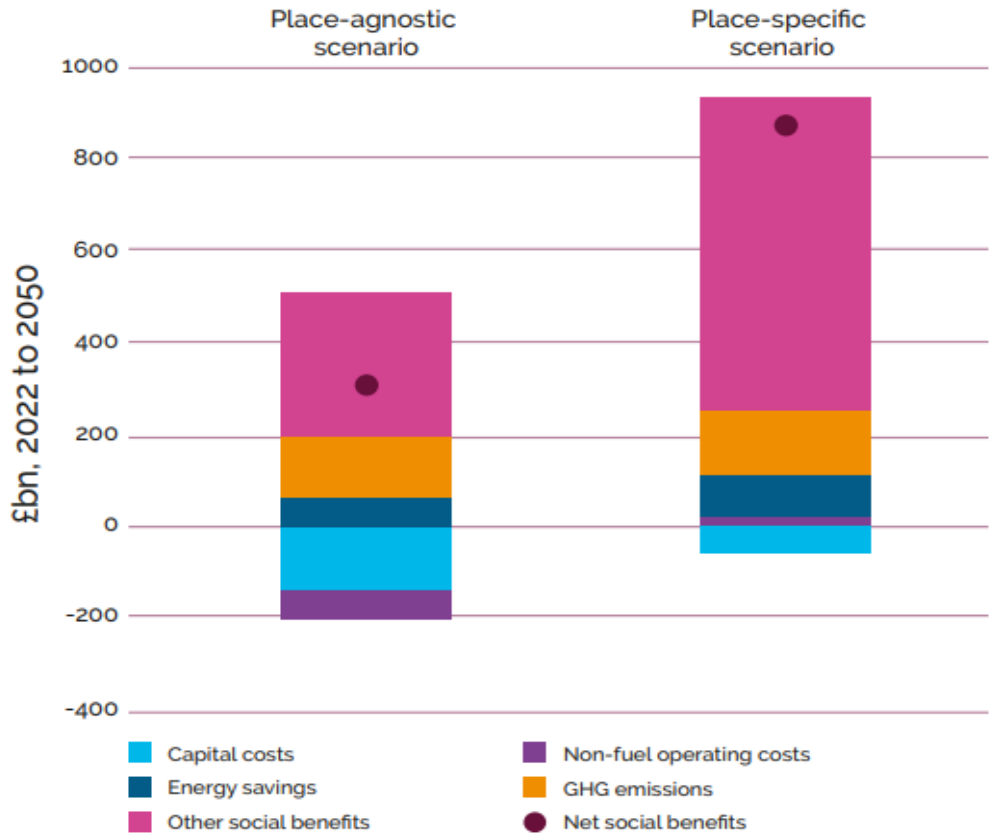
But why are local authorities important in the transition to net zero?

The UK Government's Net Zero Strategy highlighted that 82% of all UK GHG emissions are within the scope of influence of local authorities

A Local authority approach to net zero is cheaper and more beneficial…

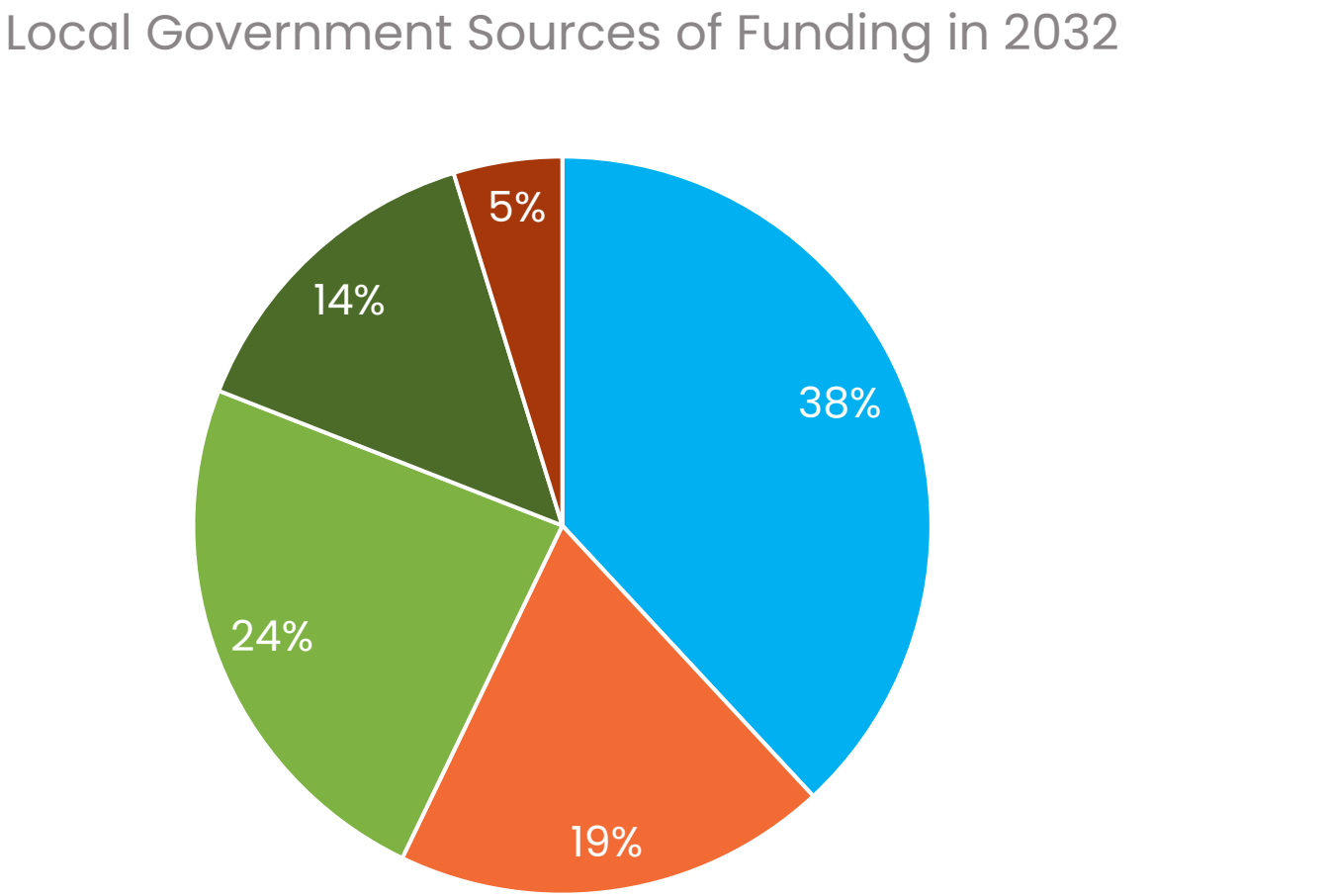
A study conducted by UKRI , involving six diverse local authorities, showed that taking a place-specific approach would require £58 billion total investment between now and 2035 and would return a total of £825 billion in social and economic benefits in the next 30 years; whereas, a place-agnostic approach would require a total of £195 billion investment and return £444 billion in the same timeframe (Figure 3).

Figure 3: The "size of the prize" in a place-agnostic and place-specific scenario



How might the allocation of sources of funds look like in 10 years' time?

Green Finance Institute



Case studies: Local Climate Bonds

Previous issuances using the Abundance platform

	1 West Berkshire Council	2 Warrington Borough Council	3 Islington	4 Camden	5 Cotswold District Council	6 Telford & Wrekin Council
Date of issuance	16 July 2020	25 August 2020	29 October 2021	8 March 2022	27 April 2022	19 May 2022
Amounts raised	£1m on 11 Oct 2020 (5 days ahead of deadline)	£1m on 18 Nov 2020	£1m on 29 Jan 2022	£1m on 28 Jun 2022	£0.5m on 16 Aug 2022	£0.3m on 29 Sep 2022
Financial details	5-year investment with a **1.2%** return rate	5-year investment with a **1.2%** return rate	5-year investment with a **1.55%** return rate	5-year investment with a **1.75%** return rate	5-year investment with a **2.1%** return rate	5-year investment with a **2.1%** return rate
Use of Funds *(not exhaust.)*	• Solar PV roof on council facilities • Urban tree planting • Wildlife Improvements	• Co-funded development of ground mounted solar system with addition of battery storage	• Zero carbon recycling • EV charging infrastructure • Initiatives aimed at improving air quality	• EV charging points • Replacing council's fleet with green alternatives • Solar panels	• EV charging points • Energy efficiency improvements in the Council's offices	• Grants to local organisations and businesses • EE upgrades to temporary and supported housing • EV minibus fleet

LCB Campaign

Map of issuances and signatories with political majority at time of issuance

Past issuances:

- West Berkshire
- Warrington
- Islington
- Camden
- Cotswold
- Telford & Wrekin

Other pledge signatories:

- Blaenau Gwent
- Eastbourne
- Lewes
- Westminster
- Lewisham

Key – political majority at time of issuance

- Conservative
- Labour
- LibDem
- Hung Council

GFI x GMCA Partnership

GMCA x GFI Partnership

The Green Finance Institute and the GMCA have **established a portfolio of five innovative financial solutions in the region**, that will offer homeowners and landlords access to attractive sources of private and blended capital to fund energy efficiency upgrades to their homes.

Portfolio of financial solutions

1. **Integrated Retrofit Finance:** Incorporating attractive private financial options into retrofit programmes in the community.
2. **Green Mortgage Campaign:** Collaborating with local and national mortgage lenders, brokers and influencers, the GFIs campaign aims to increase awareness and engagement across the market.
3. **Local Climate Bonds (LCBs):** A debt instrument issued by Local Authorities to raise capital to fund their net-zero and low-carbon projects.
4. **Green Rental Agreements (GRAs):** Innovative form of rental agreement to address the 'split incentive' between landlords and tenants in privately rented homes.
5. **Property Linked Finance (PLF):** A new, innovative financial instrument that enables homeowners to receive financing to support 100% of the upfront costs for a retrofit project.

Delivery plans for 2022/23

- **Launch partnership with GMCA** (Jul 2022)
- **Develop programme governance** and define workstream priorities (Sept/Oct 2022)
- **Deliver 'phase one' pilot schemes** including Financing Retrofit, LCBs and Green Mortgage campaign (H1 2023)
- **Launch 'phase two' pilot schemes** including GRAs and PLF (H2 2023 onwards)
- **Scale the pilot schemes** across GM districts and build relationships with other LAs

Green Finance Institute

GMCA x GFI Partnership

Partnership announcement gained **significant interest** across national and local media

GMCA announcement – July 2022

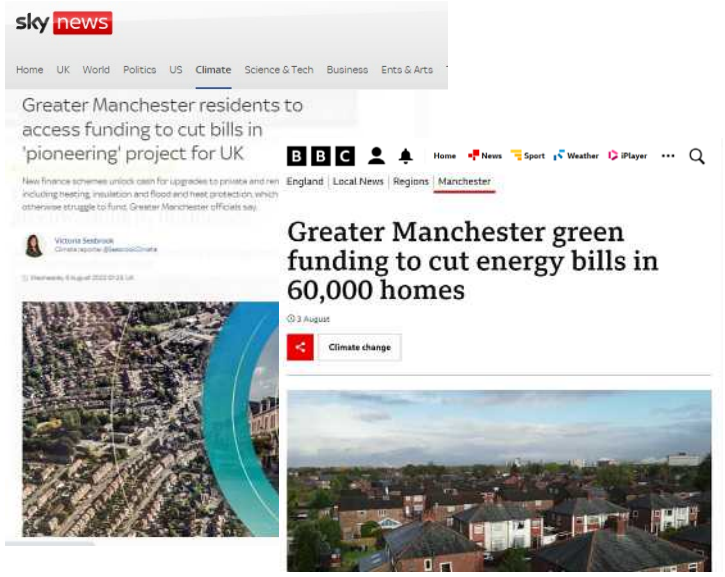
18 18 pieces of print, online and radio coverage in nationals, local government and housing trades, and regionals,. Highlights include BBC, Sky News and BBC Radio Manchester

1 The announcement featured for one full day of bulletins on BBC Radio Manchester.

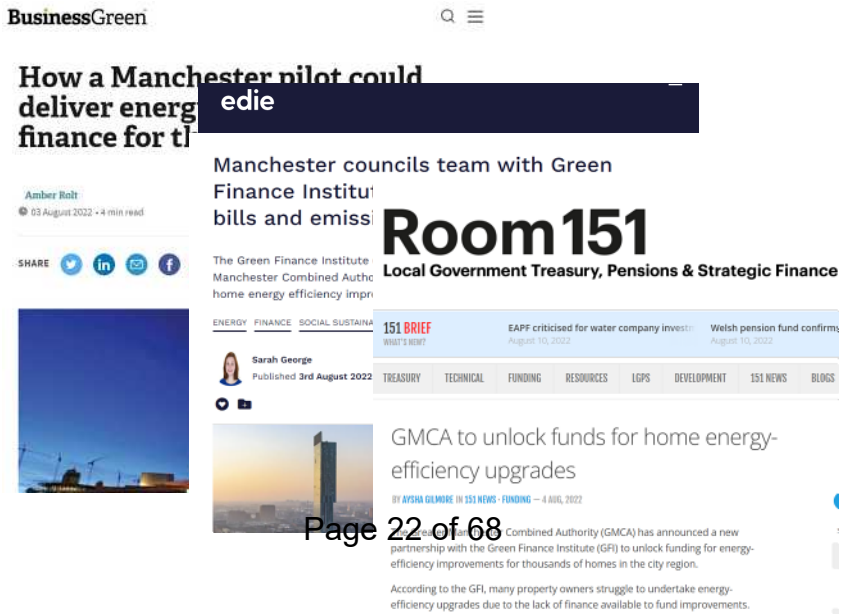
7 7 syndicated articles of the Sky News article

62.5k Estimated total coverage views of the campaign across traditional online media.

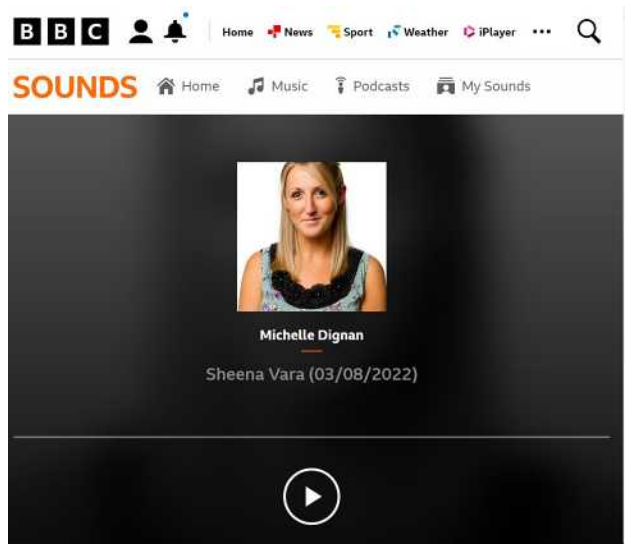
Top tier / national



Trade



Radio



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Portfolio of financial solutions

Financial Solutions	Benefits
Local Climate Bonds • LAs can secure funding for NZ projects via crowdfunding from citizens • Shown to be an effective way to raise private investment at a lower borrowing cost • Creates a strong connection with the local community	✓ **Interest rates below PWLB** → cost-effective funding model ✓ Creates **engagement with local community** → diversifying sources of funding, and investors are offered a **low-risk return** ✓ Low cost whilst **guaranteeing returns for investors**
Green Mortgage Campaign • Our campaign promotes awareness, engagement, and adoption of green mortgages • GFI has teamed up with local and national mortgage lenders, brokers, influencers • Aims to make it easier for homeowners to access environmentally-friendly products	✓ **Builds momentum** behind the green mortgages ✓ **Encourages lenders** to launch more rewarding green products ✓ **Rewards** residential property owners to make EE improvements
Integrated Retrofit Finance • Incorporating attractive financial options into local retrofit programmes • We aim to streamline the customer experience and reduce the risk of dropouts. • These initiatives can be implemented in both new and existing retrofit schemes	✓ **Incentivises** retrofit for residents who may not have access to savings ✓ **Advancement at scale** towards net zero and retrofit targets
Green Rental Agreements • GRAs incentivise landlords to improve the energy efficiency of their properties • Provides landlords with a transparent way to offer their tenants a "warm rent" • Landlords can recoup part of their investment in EE improvements over time	✓ **Addresses the 'split incentive'** between landlord and tenant ✓ Enables landlords to **achieve compliance** with upcoming regulations ✓ **Strengthens engagement** with institutional landlords in the local region
Property Linked Finance • An innovative financial solution that is not currently available in the UK • Lending is linked to the property rather than individual consumer • Based on successful mechanisms developed in the US and elsewhere globally	✓ **Enables retrofit at scale** by ensuring repayment remains with the property over extended timescales ✓ **Addresses the barrier** associated with large up-front retrofit costs ✓ **Incentivises** retrofit for residents who may not have access to savings

Workstream update: progress since launch

Local Climate Bonds

- Proposal to issue 'demonstrator' GMCA LCB to fund GM green projects

Integrated Retrofit Finance

- Initial pilot proposal scoping complete to integrate retail bank lending offer to Your Home Better

Green Mortgage Campaign

- Campaign to launch early 2023

Green Rental Agreements

- Working group established to identify pilot opportunities in 2023

Property Linked Finance

- Initial discovery phase completed by GFI to develop UK PLF proposition

Next Steps

- Complete GMCA governance process (Jan/Feb '23)
- Issue demonstrator LCB (H2 '23)
- Define long term strategy to scale LCB market in GM

- Continue to develop proposition with YHB and GMCA
- Identify further finance partners, including institutional investors and retail banks

- Define campaign strategy and delivery plan (Jan '23)
- Launch Green Mortgage Campaign (March '23)
- Scale campaign across GM districts (H2 '23)

- Continue to engage with local market to identify pilot opportunities (Q1 '23)
- Produce thought leadership and host events to raise profile of GRAs (H1 '23)

- Develop PLF operating model and proposition blueprint (H1 '23)
- Commence work with UK market and regulators to develop delivery roadmap (H2 '23)

Green Finance Institute

Next Steps

Deliver the demonstrator projects in GM

Scale-up the programmes across the region

Create partnerships with other Combined & Local Authorities

Green Finance Institute

Thank you

Matt Ferretti

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Draft Equality Information Report 2023

Scrutiny Committee
19 January 2023

Introduction

- Statutory duty to publish annual equality information to consider when developing policy, delivering services and managing our workforce
- New format for 2023 with five sections:
  - Our duty
  - Working with our communities
  - Celebrations and commemorations
  - Changing how we do things
  - Information about our people, customers and employees

Why a revised format

- Census 2021 data largely unpublished
- Change to Equality diversity and inclusion strategy publication
- Needs to be more accessible
- Covid-19 and Cost of living crisis
- Best practice

What's changed

2019 - 2022	2023
Predominantly charts, tables & infographics	Limited data charts as they are not deemed accessible
Limited commentary	Stronger narrative
Limited information on our wider approach to reducing inequality	Covers our council wide approach to reducing inequalities
Limited examples of how we have made a difference	Evidence throughout of how we are helping those suffering from inequality
Limited definitions	Plain English definitions

Cross council working

Strategy	Information governance	Housing development
HR and organisational development	Neighbourhood and community enabling	Leisure and cultural services
Home improvement	Community support	Revenues and benefits
Change and transformation	Community safety	Housing partnerships
Environmental strategy	Leisure development	Estate management
Specialist support	Tenancy services	Customer contact
Housing income and money advice	Design conservation and landscapes	Homeless and rough sleepers
Democratic services	Property development	Economic development
Communications	Housing partnerships	Independent living
Housing outcomes	Customer experience	Procurement

Section one:
Our duty

- Legislation, our duty and how we can make a difference
- Inclusion of definition boxes
- Inclusion of reference to socio-economic duty
- Our equality objectives
- How we meet our duty

Section two:
Working with our communities

- Delivered/supported a host of projects involving officers, partners and communities
- Secured external funding from a range of sources
- Helped and supported people across a variety of communities
- Focus on people, place and economy

Section three:
Celebrations and commemorations

Black History Month	Trees for Peace
Armed Forces Week	Refugee Week
St Martin's granted Freedom of the City	Opening doors to a better economy
Commemorating the holocaust	Lviv and Odesa granted Freedom of the City

Section four:

Changing how we do things

- Putting our people first: residents/employees
- Change of mind set and approach through covid-19 and now Cost of living
- Building on our successes
- Recognising where we need to change
- Having a diverse and inclusive workforce

Section five:

Information about our people, customers and employees

State of Norwich	RITAs / NODA	People	Age
Eastern European breakdown	Migration	Sexual orientation	Sex
Free school meals	Employment rates	Local deprivation	Claimant counts
Gross annual pay	Vulnerability index	Universal credit	Hate crimes
Hate incidents	Translations and interpretations	Complaints	Tenants
Employees	Disability	Race	Working pattern
Recruitment	Gender pay gap	Menopause	Hybrid working
Flexible working	Living wage	Data sources	Useful links

Publication

Equality and diversity

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion policy

Equality information reports

We are committed to equality of opportunity and celebrate the diversity of all its residents, visitors, applicants and employees.

Our equality policy, and associated documents, explains the expectations of ourselves and our partners regarding equalities. It is at the heart of all decision making and service planning at Norwich City Council.

We commit to continuously learning and improving our equality and diversity knowledge and practice:

- as a community leader
- as a provider of services
- as an employer.

If you have any questions or comments about equality and diversity please contact us.

NORWICH City Council

MINUTES

Scrutiny Committee

16:30 to 18:50 **2 February 2023**

Present: Councillors Wright (chair), Carlo, Driver, Fulton-McAlister (M), Galvin, Huntley, Osborn, Sands (M) (substitute for Thomas (Va)) and Stutely

Apologies: Councillors Brociek-Coulton, Padda, Thomas (Va), Thomas (Vi) and Young

(Also present Councillors Harris, deputy leader and cabinet member for social housing, Kendrick, cabinet member for resources and Waters, leader of the council).

1. Declarations of interest

Councillor Stutely declared an other interest in relation to item 3 (below) in that he was a director of Norwich Regeneration Ltd.

2. Minutes

RESOLVED to agree the accuracy of the minutes of the meeting held on 8 December.

3. The council's 2023-24 budget and medium-term financial strategy

(Councillor Stutely had declared an other interest in this item.)

The interim chief finance officer introduced the item and then took member questions. He advised that the provisional local government settlement was released at the end of last year and that no changes were expected. He noted highlights from the provisional settlement, the referendum threshold for council tax was set at above 3% and there were changes to the grant funding that local government received. The increase in core spending for Norwich was 4.7% which was below the average for district councils and represented a challenging settlement for the council.

The interim chief finance officer advised that the 2023/24 budget was balanced without the use of financial reserves. Similarly, the medium-term financial strategy for the period 2023-2027 was balanced. There were in year savings proposed to achieve the balancing of the budget however, there was a risk associated with this. The report did not refer to the council's base budget but focussed on changes to it such as investment growth and grant changes. Finally he noted that section 7 of the report, Chief Finance Officer's Statement highlighted the robustness of the budget and the adequateness of the council's reserves.

The chair advised that committee would take each section of the report in turn, considering any recommendations at the end of each section.

Section 1: Local Government Finance Settlement

The leader of the council highlighted that the government used data from 2014/15 to calculate the local government settlement and that this needed updating to take account of the changing economic situation and population demographics.

A member noted that the new homes bonus payment to the council had fallen by approximately £0.5m and asked how the number of new homes was calculated. The interim chief finance officer advised that it was the number of new homes which came into occupation. There was a 0.4% disregard and it was the net figure for new properties meaning that demolitions and redevelopments came off the total. He advised the council had failed to meet the threshold to be awarded the new homes bonus by a small margin. The member asked if the intensification of properties counted such as the change of use of a house to a House in Multiple Occupation. In response the interim chief finance officer said it was new properties as based on the council tax register.

In response to a member question the interim chief finance officer agreed planning for the budget with uncertainty in relation to government funding was difficult. He noted that 2024/25 was an election year and depending on the outcome, local government financing could change. In terms of managing the budget in a time of uncertainty he emphasised prudent assumptions were made especially in relation to income levels with reserves held to mitigate the uncertainty.

(Councillor Fulton-McAlister (M) joined the meeting at this point).

Section 2: General Fund – MTFS and 2023-24 Budget

A member noted that there was uncertainty over the cost implications of delivering the council's net zero carbon objective and asked what assessments had been undertaken to identify the cost implications. The member questioned whether reserves should be used to undertake works such as retrofitting. In response the interim chief finance officer advised work was underway to establish the baseline the council was starting from not just in relation to the council's carbon output but from providers whom services were procured from. He emphasised that achieving the objective would take significant amounts of external funding.

The member asked if alternative sources of funding such as blended finances and municipal bonds had been explored. The chief executive officer emphasised that the council was actively looking for funds and had a good track record of bidding for funding to achieve its objectives. The head of strategy, engagement and culture advised that a report would be considered at the Climate and Environment Emergency Executive Panel (CEEEP) on 14 February 2023 which would present the council's overall programme for carbon neutrality. The leader of the council emphasised that the council was looking at a wide range of funding options to achieve its carbon neutrality ambitions.

In response to a member question on how financial reserves had been maintained in the face of economic challenges the chief executive officer advised that there had been a change in the management of budgets. An emergency review of budgets was conducted in 2020 due to the pandemic and the need to achieve £3m in year savings. This had embedded financial control and discipline. Budget managers had undertaken training to ensure forecasting was accurate and the process was owned by the senior management team. If a budget was at risk of being overspent in year then decisions such as freezing recruitment to certain posts was taken. The interim chief finance officer emphasised that the council's strong budgetary position was a reflection of robust financial management.

In response to a member question the interim chief finance officer advised that until 2024/25 there was a reasonable amount of confidence in the income figures the council would receive from government but after that figures were speculative. The council had to achieve £5.6m in savings over the period 2023-2027 and there was currently £6m available to flex the budget but these figures would change. The medium term financial strategy was normally a five year rolling programme but it was now a four year programme as figures were speculative after two years.

A member noted that the Bank of England had declared there to be a recession and asked how this was factored into the budget. The interim chief finance officer advised this was an area which relied on advice from the Treasury Management advisor to the council. They provided a forecast which included optimistic, pessimistic and most likely position of where interest rates would be and the pessimistic rate was the one taken. He noted that inflation had an impact of the council's finances especially in relation to pay inflation with every 1% increase in pay equating to £230,000. There was a £400,000 contingency fund in the budget to manage risk and there were various short-term measures which could be used to reduce spend such as vacancy management panels.

A member asked what proportion of savings was assisted by interest rates going up. The interim chief finance officer commented that of £5.5m of savings in 2023/24 £3.5m could be attributable to additional investment interest, reduced loan repayments and discounts following the prepayment of secondary pension contributions. In response to the member's subsequent question he advised that cash reserves would not be held on the basis of making income and even when the interest rate was negligible they were still held. Cash was borrowed when interest rates were low and this resulted in surplus cash at various points. The leader of the council commended the Treasury Management team and noted that the council had long experience in managing budget gaps from the first financial crash in 2008-9.

In response to a member question on the reduction of ear marked reserves, the interim chief finance officer responded that there had been a programme of draw downs for scheduled works. £400,000 had come from the commercial property reserve to fund mechanical and electrical works on the council's commercial investment properties and the strategic asset management review had been funded. The reserve was expected to be replenished after the asset management work was completed. As regards Norwich Regeneration Ltd, accounting rules had changed regarding providing loans to third parties, specific funds had been allocated to meet the minimum revenue repayment to adhere to the new regulations.

In response to a member question asking what the £170,000 spend in the 2023/24 capital programme for Riverside Leisure was, the head of strategy, engagement and culture responded this was plant maintenance. She advised that there was a project looking at how to reduce carbon but that this was not costed yet.

A member referred to the recent increase in car parking charges and asked what alternative sources of finances had been considered to replace this funding noting that there had been a commitment to reducing car parking spaces in the city. The chief executive officer advised work had been ongoing to improve data on car park usage to establish which were being used and which over time might be used differently. He emphasised that pedestrianisation of the city would be increased and the council supported the development of sustainable transport solutions and the use of less polluting vehicles. However, there would always be a need for car parks. The leader of the council noted that car parking income would be increasingly important in future.

A member referred to the estate aesthetics budget and asked for examples of investments and what these had meant for communities on the ground. The deputy leader and cabinet member for social housing commented that enhancements ranged from a new bench on a sheltered housing scheme to new drying areas provided. She emphasised that every councillor was able to put forward ideas and was pleased to note that the budget looked like it would all be used this year.

A member expressed concern that electronic advertising hoardings would be placed on vacant council land to generate income. The interim chief finance officer advised that the advertising budget referred to an income generating opportunity to be explored later in the MTFS. There was further work to be undertaken in relation to potential sites and income revenue but he noted the member's concern.

In response to a member question asking how confident the council could be that its in year savings would be met the chief executive officer advised that there was a risk attached. However, to mitigate this every saving was evidenced via a business case, stress tested internally and the delivery of savings was monitored by the senior management team. This monitoring enabled early intervention to be taken where savings might not be met and reserves could absorb in year shocks.

In terms of what measures were in place to safeguard the organisation's position against financial shocks the chief executive officer continued that budgets were actively managed. The interim chief finance officer commented that insurance was a useful tool to manage financial risk. He referred to the council's commercial property portfolio, the earmarked reserve covered risks such as voids and the deterioration of the asset.

A member asked if there was the resource for the council to continue with a full Council Tax Reduction Scheme (CTRS) and how many citizens benefitted from the scheme. The cabinet member for resources confirmed that the 100% CTRS would continue and the interim chief finance officer advised the scheme was fully budgeted for at a cost of £1.9m. He noted that 61% of respondents to the budget consultation had strongly supported the continuation of the scheme.

Consultation

A member commented that this year the consultation was a more interactive process and garnered a large amount of responses. The member asked how these responses were shared with officers and how they impacted the formulation of the budget. The head of strategy, engagement and culture advised that the responses were shared with the corporate and senior leadership teams and work was ongoing to consider how to communicate more widely with staff. There was also a citizen participation strategy in progress which would take account of what communities wanted to speak to the council about rather than the other way around.

Section 3: Housing Revenue Account 2023-24 Budget

A member noted that a key theme from the consultation was concern with the cost of living crisis and asked how this was reflected in the decision to raise council housing rents by 7%. The deputy leader and cabinet member for social housing emphasised that the income for the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) was rent which funded new homes and upgrades to current stock. She did not underestimate the impact the increase would have on tenants but referred to the impact of the cap on social housing rents which resulted in a 1% reduction on rents every year for a four year period. The chief executive officer noted that the budget was not agreed until the meeting of full council on 21 February which gave members time to consider the responses.

The cabinet member for resources stressed that the most financially vulnerable tenants would be protected by housing benefit. A member considered those in private rented accommodation the most vulnerable as they were limited by the amount of housing benefit they could claim which very often did not cover the full rent. A member asked about the impact of right to buy on the council's housing stock. The deputy leader and cabinet member for social housing advised that 752 homes were lost in the last five years and it was estimated that 140 would be lost every year for the next five years. She also emphasised the limitations on the use of right to buy receipts and how this affected the ability to deliver new affordable housing.

A member asked how targets for making council homes more energy efficient and retrofitting were tracked. The interim chief finance officer advised the HRA's 30 year business plan had assumptions about the cost of retrofitting built in but it was unclear how much the council would receive in government funding. The executive director of community services advised that a full stock condition survey would be conducted in 2023/24 which would build the detail behind the assumptions in the HRA business plan and feed into the five year plan.

In response to a member question the executive director for community services advised that the council was moving to deliver bathroom and kitchen upgrades when they had come to the end of their useful life rather than at a set time. The savings from this more efficient approach would be used to fund retrofitting and to make homes more energy efficient. In reference to a whole house approach to retrofitting, stock condition and thermography surveys would be conducted to help identify properties. Members discussed a recommendation in relation to a whole house approach to the decarbonisation of housing stock and its cost implications. The

Executive Director of Communities noted the HRA 30 year business plan report had recently been presented at cabinet and wanted to refer to that to ensure this was not already taken account of. Members agreed that she would work outside of the meeting with Councillor Galvin on a recommendation as detailed above.

Section 4: Capital and Commercial Strategy including Capital Programme

A member referred to the table at 4.1, agenda page 78 and asked if there should be a strand to demonstrate how the council would reduce its carbon emissions over the next 30 years and improve biodiversity. The interim chief finance officer advised it was indicative of some projects the council were working on but agreed that it could be improved. A member asked for detail on the regulatory services digitalisation project as listed in the table. The chief interim finance officer advised that this referred to the service review of regulatory services such as planning and environmental health services and the introduction of digitalisation to drive efficiencies.

In response to a member question relating to the Asset Management Strategy the chief finance officer noted that the Strategy included a review of the council's commercial and property assets to derive as much income as effectively as possible.

Section 5: Treasury Management Strategy

A member raised a concern regarding the council's bank and its lack of ethical credentials. The interim chief finance officer advised there was not a lot of choice in the market but an open and vigorous tender process would be conducted when the current contract ended. The leader of the council agreed this could be considered when retendering was conducted and the ethical credentials of possible banks could be considered.

Section 6: Summary of Key Financial indicators, Section 7: Chief Finance Officer's Statement, Section 8: Financial Glossary, Section 9: Equality Impact Assessment

Members noted these sections.

RESOLVED to ask the executive director of community services to work with Councillor Galvin, to formulate a recommendation to cabinet around a whole house approach to decarbonisation. [1]

4. Update from the NHOSC representative

The chair noted that the council's NHOSC representative had sent apologies for the meeting and the update would be taken at a later meeting.

[1] The following recommendation was submitted to cabinet on 8 February 2023 and agreed: pilot a whole house approach to decarbonisation of our council homes. Use data, information and practice gathered from the pilot, alongside stock condition data and thermography surveys to support the development of the Housing Revenue Account Decarbonisation Plan.

5. Scrutiny Committee work programme 2022-23

RESOLVED to note the Scrutiny Committee work programme 2022-23.

CHAIR

NORWICH City Council

Item 4

Committee Name: Scrutiny
Committee Date: 16/03/2023
Report Title: Scrutiny Committee Work Programme 2022-23

Portfolio: Councillor Kendrick, cabinet member for resources

Report from: Executive director of community services

Wards: All Wards

OPEN PUBLIC ITEM

Purpose
To assist scrutiny committee members to review the scrutiny committee work programme 2022-23.

Recommendation:

1) That members consider:

   a) Whether to add the item on 'the purpose and efficacy of council consultations' as attached at appendix B, to the 2023-24 scrutiny committee work programme; and

   b) If the format of an informal workshop to discuss work programming should be replicated on 25 May 2023

2) Members note the deadline of submission of TOPIC forms for the upcoming civic year of Friday 28 April 2023

Policy Framework

The Council has five corporate priorities, which are:

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

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

Report Details

Developing a work programme for the scrutiny committee

1. Members had an informal work programme setting workshop on 26 May 2022, the work programme was then reviewed and ratified at the committee meeting on 9 June 2022. The work programme was further updated at the committee meetings on 14 July 2022, 13 October 2022 and 8 December 2022 and is attached as Appendix A.

Recurring items

2. There are certain items that occur throughout the civic year that are programmed in. These are the scrutiny committee work programme (each meeting), Equality Information Report (December/ January), pre-scrutiny of the proposed budget (February) and the annual review of the scrutiny committee (March).

3. Updates are received from the council's representative on the Norfolk Health and Overview Scrutiny Committee (NHOSC) and the council's representative on the Norfolk Countywide Community Safety Partnership Scrutiny Sub Panel (NCCSPSSP).

Scope for scheduling items onto the work programme

4. It has been previously agreed that committee should agree as few as possible substantive topics per meeting. The main reason for this is to ensure that there is enough time for the committee to effectively consider the issues and make fair and evidence based recommendations. Ideally one substantive item per meeting would be the aim.

5. Members are able to revise the work programme on a month basis if and when required due to changing events. This is done through the work programme standing item at each meeting. Members therefore may wish to consider keeping some space on the work programme to facilitate this.

6. On 19 January 2023, the committee discussed the topic of Green Financing and concluded that recommendations on this item would be best considered after the CEEEP meeting on 14 February 2023.

7. An item has been added to this agenda for members to make recommendations on this item.

8. At its meeting on 17 November 2022, the committee considered a report on debt advice and support services. A number of recommendations were made, one of which was that council tax and housing benefit letters when revised are brought to scrutiny committee to be reviewed and that partners such as the tenant improvement panel, leaseholder group, Citizens Advice Bureau and Norfolk Community Law Service are consulted on changes.

9. An initial draft of a revision to the Housing Benefit notification letter, to include a summary letter and appeal rights, will be circulated to members of the committee by email for their comments and a final draft brought to a meeting of the scrutiny committee in the new civic year.

10. A TOPIC form for consideration has been received and is attached as appendix B to this report. Members are asked to consider the topic proposed - the purpose and efficacy of council consultations - and whether this should be programmed into the work of the committee in the next civic year.

11. In the last civic year, an informal workshop was held for members to discuss items for the work programme, which was finalised at the June meeting of the committee. Members are asked to consider if this is a format that they would like to replicate for the next civic year, with the workshop being held on Thursday 25 May 2023.

12. In preparation for the work programming for the upcoming civic year, members are asked to submit any TOPIC forms with suggested items by Friday 28 April 2023.

Consultation

13. Members of the scrutiny committee were consulted on the attached work programme at the meeting on 13 October 2022. Members of the public are encouraged to submit topics for scrutiny via a form on the council's website. The portfolio holder will be briefed as part of the regular portfolio holder briefings.

Implications

Financial and Resources

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

15. Any impact on resources resulting from this report will be accommodated within existing budgets or the relevant approvals will be sought if additional budget is required.

Legal

16. No specific legal implications of this report.

Statutory Considerations

Consideration	**Details of any implications and proposed measures to address:**
Equality and Diversity	None
Health, Social and Economic Impact	None
Crime and Disorder	None
Children and Adults Safeguarding	None
Environmental Impact	None

Risk Management

Risk	Consequence	Controls Required
None		

Other Options Considered

17. There have been no other options considered for this report.

Reasons for the decision/recommendation

18. This is a standing item on the scrutiny committee agenda to allow members to review the scrutiny committee work programme.

Background papers: None

Appendices:

Appendix A – Scrutiny committee work programme 2022-23

Appendix B – TOPIC form

Contact Officer:

Name: Lucy Palmer

Telephone number: 01603 989515

Email address: lucypalmer@norwich.gov.uk

Date	Report	Purpose	Portfolio Holder + Senior Officer + Report author
16/03/2023	Recommendations on 'Green Financing'	To consider recommendations following the item on Green Financing.	
16/03/2023	Welcoming refugees into Norwich and overcoming obstacles to their smooth integration	To consider a report on "welcoming refugees into Norwich and overcoming obstacles to their smooth integration"	Cllr Waters Lou Rawsthorne Leah Mickleborough
16/03/2023	Updates from NHOSC and NCCSPSSP	To receive a report from council's representative on NHOSC and NCCSPSSP	Cllr Kendrick Lou Rawsthorne Alex Hand
TBC June 2023	Levelling Up Agenda	To consider a report on the "Levelling Up agenda"	Cllr Waters Graham Nelson Ellen Tilney

Scrutiny TOPIC form

Good governance and scrutiny helps reduce risk, increases resilience, improves decision making and delivers value for money. The information you give on this form will help shape the scrutiny work programme for the civic year 2022-23.

Please tell us what item you would like considered on the work programme and a brief scope.

YOUR ITEM: The purpose and efficacy of council consultations

BRIEF SCOPE: The scrutiny committee will consider the council's overall strategy and approach in relation to consultations and how this could be improved. The committee will look at the general strategy in relation to when consultations are held, how they are being held and how responses are supposed to be used. The scrutiny committee will also consider this strategy and the general approach to consultation as well as specific examples of Norwich City Council consultations against best practice. The scrutiny committee will consider recent council consultations such as those on the proposed Hackney carriage licence fee increase, council budget, and proposed parking charges at Eaton Park. The committee will ask what the purpose of council consultations was and how different responses to the consultations would have led to different policy outcomes. The committee will go on to ask how the consultations were put together, how respondents were sought, whether the forms of communication used were appropriate and what the value of the consultation was overall.

Your item will be considered for inclusion on the work programme on the following criteria and reviewed by senior officers for the availability of officer and financial resources. Please give as much information as possible for each criteria below:

TOPIC	**Rationale**	**Implications/resource requirements to Norwich City Council**
TIME Is this the right time to review the issue?	The council carries out a number of consultations each year and it is important that these consultations give value for money and help provide better services for Norwich residents. In addition, the peer	Good use can be made of the first scrutiny meeting of the civic year by taking this substantive item.

	review has highlighted that improved community engagement is an aspect where the council needs to improve, and consultations are part of this two-way engagement.	
OBJECTIVE What would be the objective of scrutiny? How do you feel scrutiny could make a difference?	This scrutiny will identify the value of recent consultations and recommend ways in which they could be improved which would offer better value for money for the council. Expectations of residents and councillors will be considered and this scrutiny will enable a closer match between these expectations and reality in future. In addition, the committee will look more broadly at the general strategy and approach of the council in relation to consultations and how this form of engagement data is being used. The objective is to make recommendations in relation to the council's approach to consultations in line with feedback and best practice.	Information about the use and success of different types of consultation may be required for scrutiny members. However, using this information would improve council consultations and this could save money in the medium term.
PERFORMANCE Can performance in this area be improved by scrutiny input?	Better consultations would be created if the outcomes of this scrutiny were considered when new consultations were being written and advertised. These new consultations would lead to better council services and better value for money. Residents would feel more included in the council's activity, so this would be good for the reputation of the council as well as the wellbeing of residents. It would help address one of the	Additional training for staff may be required, but this expenditure would be recouped through better consultations.

	areas of improvement highlighted in the peer review.	
PUBLIC **I**NTEREST what would be the public interest in placing this topic onto the work programme?	The public interest would be served through the improvement of council services. Members of the public would be invited to participate in better consultations which would be of more value to them and result in their interests being clear.	Improved services.
CONTRIBUTION How would a scrutiny review contribute to achieving our corporate aims?	This scrutiny review would clearly contribute to achieving two of the main aims of the corporate plan: Aim 1 – people live independently and well in a diverse and safe city – *Listen to communities and use their views in decision making* Aim 5 – Norwich City Council is in good shape to serve the city. – *Be open and transparent, with accessible data and decisions which are subject to public scrutiny*	

Practical Considerations:

Undertaking the review Have you got any thoughts about how the scrutiny committee could undertake their review?	The committee would consider the council's general approach to consultations and how consultation responses are used. The committee will also consider best practice in relation to local government consultations. The committee would apply a set of questions to recent consultations to ascertain how they were carried out, what the value of them was, and how the expectations of residents and other participant in the consultations were met.

Would there be specific individuals, such as outside organisations, who could provide evidence or would need to be engaged in the review?	Experts on best practice consultation could be invited, e.g., researchers on elements of successful consultations or LGA experts. People who had participated in recent consultations could also be asked for their views. .
Do you believe consultation with particular groups would be helpful to support the review?	People that it would be useful to include would be: Respondents to recent consultations, council officers who are responsible for the overall approach on the council's consultations, officers who created the consultations, and councillors.
If the scope of your review is potentially quite broad, do you believe there are ways to narrow it down or areas that you would like particular focus on?	The review could consider just one recent consultation, but it would be better to consider more than one.
Have you discussed the potential scope of this review with lead officers or the portfolio holder? Did they have any thoughts on the review, its scope, timing etc?	

NORWICH City Council

Item 6

Committee name: Scrutiny

Committee date: 16/03/2023

Report title: Scrutiny review of welcoming Refugees and Asylum Seekers to Norwich and overcoming obstacles to their smooth integration

Portfolio: Councillor Alan Waters, Leader of the Council

Report from: Head of legal and procurement

Wards: All Wards

OPEN PUBLIC ITEM

Purpose

The purpose of this report is to update the Scrutiny Committee on the work undertaken to review the welcome of refugees and asylum seekers to Norwich, and how obstacles to their smooth integration can be overcome

Recommendation:

It is recommended that the Scrutiny Committee review the work undertaken at this stage and:

1) Determine whether there are any recommendations they wish to raise at this point
2) Whether they wish to commission for further work to be undertaken to discuss the initial findings

Policy framework

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

This report meets the corporate priority to ensure that people can live independently and well in a diverse and safe City

Background

1. At their meeting in January, the Scrutiny Committee agreed the terms of reference for a review of the welcome asylum seekers and refugees receive into Norwich, and how their smooth integration can be supported. It was clarified that the scope of the review also included those who had come to Norwich through the Ukrainian Settlement Scheme.

2. The Committee were supportive of surveying those organisations who support asylum seekers, as well as organising an event to meet asylum seekers and refugees to learn of their experiences. In addition, the Committee requested exploring further opportunities to meet asylum seekers and refugees, including an event at City Hall, as well as surveying them for their thoughts, subject to consulting with the City of Sanctuary.

How the work has progressed

3. The Democratic Services team have worked closely with the Communities team to progress the review, and are also grateful to Councillor Lucy Galvin for her connection with the Zainab Café to organise an event for refugees and asylum seekers.

4. Early in the process it became evident there may be some challenges in taking forward the review as envisaged. In particular, there was concern about meeting and surveying refugees and asylum seekers about their experiences, in particular potential language barriers; potential fear on the part of participants about engaging with a government institution about their experience, and the care required when working with refugees and asylum seekers to avoid triggering traumatic experiences.

5. This made it challenging to get up and running in the timeframes envisaged. At this stage, we have therefore:

    a. Directly engaged with organisations including Bridge+, New Routes, City of Sanctuary and the Zainab Café for their thoughts on the undertaking of the review and support they can provide

    b. Undertaken the survey across the organisations previously identified in the terms of reference

    c. Held an event at the Zainab Café which provided members the opportunity to talk to refugees and asylum seekers about their experiences

Outcomes from the Survey

6. The survey was sent to 14 organisations, of which only 3 full responses were received.

7. Two organisations, GYROS and Access, responded to indicate that they do not directly support refugees and asylum seekers in Norwich, in part due to the work undertaken by New Routes and Bridge+ in Norwich.

8. Dr Yasir Hameed from Norfolk and Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust kindly responded to highlight the work being done by the Rest Hub at Churchman House, Norwich. This provides sensitive referral-led clinics to Asylum Seekers and Refugees. More information can be found here

9. A summary of the responses to the survey can be found at **Appendix 1**.

Outcomes from the Zainab Café event

10. The Zainab Café is an organisation that provides work opportunities to former refugees and asylum seekers to help them gain necessary experience to then enter the workplace.

11. On Thursday, 16 February, the Zainab Café hosted an event for members of the scrutiny committee to attend with a range of refugees and asylum seekers present. Unfortunately, only 4 members were able to be present. The refugees and asylum seekers were divided into language groups, with each group supported by a translator and note-taker. Councillors could ask questions and the notes taken have been collated at **Appendix 2.**

12. We are very grateful to both the Zainab Café for hosting the event, and to those attending for being so candid in sharing their views.

13. There were some immediate needs that were raised and addressed in the meeting and afterwards; for example, one of the attendees was pregnant and was made aware of potential support after the birth of their baby. Concerns were raised relating to conditions in asylum hotels; a Council Officer attends regular partner meetings with Serco, who administer asylum seeker hotels in the East of England, and relayed the feedback we had received to Serco in order to raise with the hotels.

Other research

14. As part of their work, the Good Economy Commission explored how refugees and asylum seekers participate in the local economy. Their report can be found here

15. We have also engaged with the East of England Strategic Migration Partnership, who are formed to co-ordinate and support delivery of national asylum seeker and refugee schemes in the area. More information about the partnership including their current projects is available here

16. There is also a range of national and local guidance available about provision of support. This includes information on the Norfolk County Council website about local sources of support and the Local Government Association, who provide information about Councils' role in supporting refugees and asylum seekers here. National third sector organisations who provide support to refugees and asylum seekers include the Red Cross (more information here) and Citizens Advice

Next Steps

17. The Committee will be aware that at this stage, limited work has been undertaken. A decision needs to be made as to whether further work should progress, and if so, the focus of that further work.

18. It is evident that support for refugees and asylum seekers is a broad area; support with their health, housing, work and social integration into the area. The work of the Good Economy Commission highlights the level of depth that review of specific areas of activity can delve into.

19. As a local authority, our specific responsibilities are limited; we have a duty to provide housing to those entitled to receive housing support, and will assist with benefits or specific items such as disabled facilities grants. However, the support refugees and asylum seekers require often goes much further including education (including English language courses), physical and mental health and wellbeing, access to employment, legal support and specific forms of social services support.

20. To fully understand some of the challenges, effective engagement with partners would be required to understand the difficulties presented and gain a more rounded view regarding potential recommendations. This would likely need to include the People from Abroad team from Norfolk County Council or specialist providers linked to particular themes – such as Serco, who administer asylum seeker hotels in the region on behalf of the Home Office.

21. As a result, the scrutiny committee is being asked today whether it wishes to make initial recommendations at this stage, or to commission further work. If further work is requested, officers would be grateful to understand the level of commitment and involvement members wish to have within the process.

Consultation

22. As set out above, this report has been informed by a survey of organisations and a liaison event with refugees and asylum seekers

Implications

Financial and resources

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

24. At this stage, a contribution has been made to the running costs of the event at the Zainab Café. Officer time has also been incurred in undertaking the review work so far.

25. Clearly, any additional work will incur officer time, which will depend on the level of work commissioned.

Legal Implications

26. As above, the Council has limited duties with regards refugees and asylum seekers, with other bodies holding further statutory duties.

Statutory considerations

Consideration	Details of any implications and proposed measures to address:
Equality and diversity	Whilst this report does not present specific equality implications in its own right, further work commissioned may cause have implications (potentially positive impacts)
Health, social and economic impact	Recommendations or further work by the scrutiny committee may have a positive impact on the health, social and economic outcomes for refugees and asylum seekers
Crime and disorder	This report is not considered to have specific impacts on crime and disorder
Children and adults safeguarding	Recommendations or further work by the scrutiny committee may have a positive impact on the child and adult safeguarding risks in relation to refugees and asylum seekers
Environmental impact	This report is not considered to have specific environmental impacts

Risk management

Risk	Consequence	Controls required
Ineffective arrangements exist to support refugees and asylum seekers to integrate into the local community	Refugees and asylum seekers do not fulfil their potential as members of local society, and potentially suffer adverse health and wellbeing effects	There are a range of support mechanisms for refugees and asylum seekers locally. This review was commissioned in order to assess potential recommendations to strengthen the support received.

Other options considered

27. There are two options presented for the Scrutiny Committee to consider:

    a. Ending the review at this point, potentially making recommendations based on the work thus far

    b. Commissioning further work to be undertaken, whether as part of a broad review of asylum seeker and refugee support or to undertake a specific review of elements of the support provision

Reasons for the decision/recommendation

28. The scrutiny committee has requested a review of support for asylum seekers and refugees. This report provides an interim update on the work to date and seeks the Committee's views on how it should progress.

Appendices:

Appendix 1: Feedback from the survey of organisations who support refugees and asylum seekers
Appendix 2: Feedback from the asylum seeker and refugee event

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IN TRAN communication for all	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.

Appendix 1: Feedback from the Survey

Organisation	Q1 – are there examples of good practice to support refugees / asylum seekers?	Q2 – have you identified particular gaps in support?	Q3 – what are the greatest challenges faced by refugees and asylum seekers in Norwich?	Q4 – how might the challenges be resolved?	Q5 – how effectively do partners work well together, how can challenges be overcome?	Q6 – anything else?
New Routes	We offer a good range of informative and social activities.	ESOL provision - there needs to be a strategy around this most crucial work.	Navigating 'new', systems, cultures, traditions, etc.	Greater funding to allow for more capacity to support the emergent needs of our new arrivals. Particular focus on mental health and wellbeing.	New Routes works closely with our partner organisations such as the Bridge Plus+ and English+ and we have good relationships with the statutory sector.	No
Withheld	There is already a comprehensive network of support for asylum seekers and refugees, offering a gold-standard of service under the resettlement programme (as identified by Home Office)	There is insufficient and un-co-ordinated ESOL arrangements in place. There are too many organisations trying to get involved in supporting asylum seekers and refugees.	1. Making the transition from asylum seeker to refugee and moving from Home Office support to mainstream provision. 2. Navigating public services who are not used to working with people who do not speak English	Requires a joined-up approach between upper and lower tier authorities across the whole county, and not a Norwich-centric approach. There are 6 other district councils in Norfolk who are also facing their own challenges of supporting migration, Norwich does not need to operate in isolation or make decisions that are not in line with the rest of the county. Requires appropriate data sharing agreements to be in	I feel that partners do work together well, facilitated by the Norfolk Asylum Seeker and Refugee Forum (NASREF). Further improvements are required to break down the barriers between city and other district councils	I do not feel that Norwich City Council needs to commission its own services; this requires a joined-up approach county-wide involving councils in both tiers of local government. A co-ordinated approach to spending the

				place across the relevant agencies so that we can work together to support migrants, not working in our own silos.		government money that has been allocated for asylum dispersal is required, not for Norwich City Council to decide independently.
Norfolk and Waveney Integrated Care Board	As above- PFAT Health care team supporting dispersed asylum seekers and hotels Wellness on wheels bus supporting health access/Covid vaccinations. Inclusion Health Practices Vulnerable Adult Service Specialist MH provision.	Health Protection support for Primary care Primary care capacity MH pathway	Accommodation environment Lack of activities opportunities to join community groups/volunteer etc Wider community cohesion - impact	Community group integration capacity on VCSE sector	Good- operational group and good relationships/network between partners	

Appendix 2: Experiences of Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Norwich

People and community groups

Some refugees and asylum seekers spoke about having positive experiences of, and interactions with the people of Norwich, as they were found to be welcoming and friendly. Other refugees and asylum seekers spoke about the negative perceptions of asylum seekers and refugees, especially in regard to the view that asylum seekers commit crimes.

Refugees and asylum seekers spoke about how they felt it is sometimes difficult to be accepted as a member of British society but when visiting home, they were considered too Western.

Some people spoke about facing racism when trying to find accommodation and work, with some mentioning they felt that some refusals when job hunting were due to racism. Others spoke about negative reactions to wearing a headscarf.

While it was acknowledged that Norwich is becoming more diverse, it was perceived that there is a lack of example of people who are from a similar background to those refugees and asylum seekers we spoke to. They also mentioned that they believe this impacts their ability to access halal food.

Due to the restriction on asylum seekers accessing the labour market, many of them spend a lot of time volunteering because they want to spend time developing their skills, as many of them feel that they are suffering from skill decay. This volunteering also makes them feel like they are giving back to the community that has helped them. These volunteering opportunities are being offered through a range of organisations, such as their local churches or other community action groups.

It was common across each of the groups that much of the information they had received to date, had been provided on an informal basis. This was often through churches, schools or interpreters. In fact, it seemed clear that interpreters were acting as a main source of information and were in fact key to informing refugees and asylum seekers of different community groups and services. However, it was felt that there was no central place for everyone to go. Many refugees and asylum seekers spend time at The Forum Library as this offered free access to books, newspapers and the internet.

Housing

There was a range of experiences regarding housing. Overall, the experience of being housed, whether in hotels or council housing was largely negative. With regard to hotels, the refugees and asylum seekers expressed that the living conditions are unsatisfactory. They mentioned that the food that is being provided is not in keeping with their religious and cultural practices (halal food mostly) or was too spicy to eat or enjoy. Additionally, the hotel made no provision for the fasting period during Ramadan. The conditions of the rooms within the hotel were described as being poor, some reported issues such as overly humid and damp rooms and even the presence of insects and bed bugs.

Other refugees had been housed in council housing and spoke about their experiences. One individual mentioned that if they had known the area of Norwich that they would be housed in, they would not have agreed to the home. The area where they were living had issues related to drug and gang crime and antisocial behaviour.

Some volunteers expressed that it felt like that once someone was housed, there was no further consideration of the living standards of the home.

Healthcare

All groups expressed some issues with their experiences of the healthcare system. Some explained that they had difficulties getting appointments with their GPs and after care, post appointment. Volunteers highlighted that in many cases it seemed like refugees and asylum seekers were registered with GP surgeries that were a significant distance from their home, due to a lack of Arabic speaking doctors in reasonably close proximity to their homes. The distance to GP surgeries and pharmacies had caused health issues, as they were unable to get to the surgery easily to attend appointments or get medication from their pharmacy. All those that spoke of it mentioned that they were unable to get dental appointments.

The general feeling was that they did not understand the way the system works. There seems to be a particular lack of understanding with regards to the length of appointments, how to order repeat prescriptions and how to change the nominated pharmacy.

Language

A key topic that all groups discussed was the importance of having information in a language that they understood. All of the refugees and asylum seekers expressed great desire to learn and improve their English language skills. Many of the refugees and asylum seekers voiced that they felt there was not enough hours of English courses offered to them, this was partially due to their entitlement but was also due to a lack of knowledge of other free or low-cost English language courses. The main organisations that were spoken about were EnglishPlus and the City College. Most spoke about wanting to improve their English language so that they could better integrate into Norwich and to gain employment.

The information that asylum seekers and refugees need, often seems to only be available in English and as such means that many offers of services are not taken up, as they are unaware of these. Examples of this included things such as websites that allow refugees and asylum seekers to book courses, flyers or posters that might be placed in community hubs such as The Feed café. Greater promotion and signposting of other language and budgeting courses that are currently being offered by local organisations, also represent something the refugees and asylum seekers would like to see.

Education and employment

Many of the refugees and asylum seekers spoke about their frustration with education in Norwich. For those with children they expressed that they felt let down

by the schools. They suggested that the broader societal attitudes towards refugees and asylum seekers were reflected in the attitudes of other pupils towards the young refugees and asylum seekers. One volunteer disclosed that at their children's school, there was only one child that was a refugee and that other pupils did not interact with them. The refugees and asylum seekers also spoke about the racism that their children faced within local schools, with parents perceiving that their children were being blamed for others misbehaviour.

Younger refugees and asylum seekers expressed further frustration with the education system as due to their age they were unable to access free GCSEs. These GCSEs are required to access further education, such as A Levels and even university courses. This caused young adults to disengage from further education and lose their passion for this.

All of the groups spoke about employment, as all wanted to work if they were able to. Each group highlighted the experience and skills that they had gained from their home country. Many wanted to start working as soon as they were allowed to work, as generally, they were unhappy with receiving money for not working. However due to a range of issues, such as lack of English language skills, recognised qualifications or other barriers, they were unable to work. It was suggested that the council could work with businesses who would be willing to employ refugees with the appropriate work permits and whose English was not quite at the required level. This would aid community cohesion and allow these individuals to improve their English "on the job".

Sometimes there was a hesitance by refugees and asylum seekers to engage with services due to a fear of institutions. There was a perception that social services would remove children due different cultural understanding of discipline.

Interacting with council services

Frustrations were shared by refugees and asylum seekers and volunteers with councillors and officers in regard to contacting and interacting with the council. One volunteer highlighted that they had called the council over 15 times and each time been informed that there were no translation services, despite this being advertised on the website.

Some expressed the view that it felt like once someone was in longer term housing that they were forgotten about. A number of individuals were in unsuitable homes due to a range of issues and there was uncertainty about how to ask for changes or adaptations.

It was felt that the Norwich City Council website needed to improve as it was difficult to navigate, especially if their English language skills were not particularly strong. Those that had good English skills also found the website difficult to navigate as there was insufficient details to explain services.

Suggested solutions (please note that some of these solutions may require further discussion with other partners as to solutions that may already exist)

- Having direct outreach to asylum seekers in the hotels that they are housed in. This should include the following information (if possible via an interpreter):
    - Cultural norms, values and laws of Britain (this would prevent asylum seekers from committing crimes as things may not be seen as illegal in their home country)
    - How to access healthcare and information on how to change nominated pharmacy
    - With regard to healthcare there should also be information on how the system works such as GP appointments (i.e. the 10 minute appointments and hours of access) and services such as 111
    - Having a resource pack that signposts different organisations and charities that can offer support, as there seems to be no clear one source of information for people to access. This should be in as many different languages as possible so people are able to understand the information given to them. A list of organisations they can approach for voluntary work. Additional language lessons that are free or low cost
- To help with funding these initiatives, some suggested the provision of public lockers and public showers that are paid for. This represents a common expectation held by many of the refugees and immigrants new to the UK.
- The Norwich City Council website should be improved as it does not provide enough details to easily navigate the site if members of the public are not familiar with the various council departments.
- The council should facilitate connections to companies that are willing to hire refugees who may not have the required English skills but have other skills.
- Having a community hub that anyone can go to, in order to meet up with other people and get advice for certain things. This would also help with social isolation being experienced by people which we know contributes to poor mental health.
- Raise the issue of GP surgery allocations with NHOSC
- The council to host an event or provide opportunities to encourage integration, such as an international or cultural day
- Some refugees were interested in becoming a local councillor so suggested a talk be given to help them understand what members do
- More spaces for young people such as youth centres, so that children could interact in a safe space
- Encouraging schools to celebrate different religious holidays such as Diwali or Eid

- The council to produce a myth-busting document about asylum seekers and refugees to challenge the negative stereotypes.

- Ensure that when someone phones the council and asks for translation services that they are provided as stated via the Intran service.

- Provision of a mentor service with someone who knows areas, processes and can provide advice – sometimes interacting council services requires an advocate

- Clarity needs to be provided on the responsibilities of the various local councils and the boundaries between district councils – this should include managing expectations of what the council can achieve

- Discussion about other free resources for those that do not have the financial means to access entertainment and activities.

- Creation of opportunities for refugees and asylum seekers to share their skills and support others in their situation. For example, sharing cooking skills and recipes and using the opportunity to practice their language skills.

- The schedule of activities at The Forum heavily favours the summer, but it would be helpful to have events scheduled throughout the year.