

## Scrutiny committee

Date: **Thursday, 08 December 2022**  
Time: **16:30**  
Venue: **Council chamber 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 Council Chamber 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

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## Agenda

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- |           |  |                |
|-----------|--|----------------|
| <b>1</b>  | <b>Apologies</b><br><br>To receive apologies for absence.  |                |
| <b>2</b>  | <b>Declarations of interest</b><br><br>(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).   |                |
| <b>3</b>  | <b>Minutes</b><br><br>To agree the accuracy of the minutes of the meetings held on 13 October 2022 and 17 November 2022.   | <b>5 - 36</b>  |
| <b>4</b>  | <b>Recommendations from the update on debt advice and support services</b><br><br><b>Purpose:</b> To consider any recommendations for cabinet for the item on debt advice and support services.                                  |                |
| <b>5</b>  | <b>Update from the NHOSC representative</b><br><br><b>Purpose:</b> To consider the update from the council's representative on the Norfolk Health and Overview and Scrutiny Committee from the meeting held on 10 November 2022. | <b>37 - 40</b> |
| <b>6</b>  | <b>Scrutiny Committee Work Programme 2022-23</b><br><br><b>Purpose:</b> To assist scrutiny committee members to review the scrutiny committee work programme 2022-23.  | <b>41 - 54</b> |
| <b>*7</b> | <b>Exclusion of the public</b><br><br>Consideration of exclusion of the public.  |                |

## **EXEMPT ITEMS:**

(During consideration of these items the meeting is not likely to be open to the press and the public.)

To consider whether the press and public should be excluded from the meeting during consideration of an agenda item on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as specified in Part 1 of Schedule 12 A of the Local Government Act 1972 or it being confidential for the purposes of Section 100A(2) of that Act.

In each case, members are asked to decide whether, in all circumstances, the public interest in maintaining the exemption (and discussing the matter in private) outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

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### **\*8     NRL Business Plan 2023 -2033 (Exempt)**

- This report is not for publication because it would disclose information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information) as in para 3 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972.

Date of publication: **Wednesday, 30 November 2022**



## **Scrutiny Committee**

**16:30 to 18:05**

**13 October 2022**

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

Apologies: Councillors Wright (chair), Fulton-McAlister (M), Huntley and Padda.

### **1. Declarations of interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

### **2. Minutes**

**RESOLVED**, to approve the accuracy of the minutes of the meeting held on 14 July 2022.

### **3. County Lines**

(This item was taken first)

The chair welcomed Chris Hancock, acting community safety manager (Norwich City Council) and Detective Inspector Matt Stuart (Norfolk Constabulary), Councillor Kendrick, cabinet member for resources and Councillor Jones, cabinet member safe, strong and inclusive neighbourhoods to the meeting.

Councillor Kendrick said that all councillors were concerned with the issue of county lines and the effect that it had on communities. It was a problem that had to be tackled with a multi-agency approach, including the police, health services and social services.

Councillor Jones added that she was keen to hear from members on the topic of county lines, as the council was in the process of formulating a Community Safety Strategy.

(Members had been asked to submit questions in advance and were invited to ask these first).

In response to Councillor Carlo's question the acting community safety manager confirmed the police and council worked very closely together. On an operational basis information was shared regarding county lines activities at council properties. Council officers attended morning briefings with the police daily, regularly picking up on intelligence where county lines activities were affecting residents. In terms of actions taken by the council these had to be proportionate and depended on the vulnerability of the individual involved and the effect it was having on the neighbourhood.

In terms of process the council acted under anti-social behaviour legislation including partial closure orders that could limit which individuals could access a property. This could be used where a vulnerable tenant had been cuckooed, (a term used to describe a property being taken over and used as a base for county lines activities). Injunctions could be used to ban individuals from accessing certain areas of a housing scheme.

Project Adder, a national programme coordinating law enforcement activity whilst diverting individuals away from offending, was currently operating in the Norwich area with plans to extend out to Norfolk next year. It incorporated weekly multidisciplinary meetings including representatives for the local drug and alcohol agency.

Councillor Carlo asked if there was a distinction between county lines and drug use in general. Matt Stuart emphasised that county lines was a distinct issue, it represented a particular methodology to move large amounts of drugs primarily from cities to rural areas. It used young people to move drugs and money via road and rail networks.

County lines emerged as an issue nationally in 2016/2017 and was noted in the area from 2018/2019 with a dedicated team established within the police in 2019 to tackle the issue locally. In terms of progress, in 2019 it was determined that there were between 70 and 80 County Lines operational in Norfolk and the number of known lines currently was in the mid 20s.

Councillor Kidman asked what roles had been created and filled within the anti-social behaviour (ASB) team. The acting community safety manager replied that he had been in post since February and after a recruitment drive, an ASB manager, two enforcement officers, four ASB response officers and two triage officers had been appointed. The team were being trained as well as undertaking BTEC qualifications in related matters whilst ensuring that regular one to ones were happening.

(Members were reminded that the scope of the meeting, as agreed by the committee, was a focus on county lines activity and not anti-social behaviour.)

Councillor Galvin said that there had been a useful briefing on the work of Project Adder and asked what progress had been made to help young people by meeting their needs in other ways. Matt Stuart noted that the multi-agency approach used to tackle county lines incorporating social services, education and health, was effective. Any young person linked to county lines underwent a joint agency screening process to identify if they were at risk of exploitation. Risk assessments were graded as high, medium and low risk; with high and medium risk cases allocated to a specialist team of police and social workers. There were currently 180 open cases such as this

where young people and their families were supported. The aim was to address areas of vulnerability which had drawn them into county lines and divert them from the criminal justice system where possible. The emphasis was on treating young people as victims and not to criminalise them if possible.

Councillor Osborn noted that in the last three to four months there had been a reduction in complaints to him about the council's ASB service. He considered that there did seem to be improved joint working with the police and council's housing teams. He queried how communication was managed; residents had relayed that their case had been closed but they were unsure what action had been taken.

The acting community safety manager explained his expectation would be that when the case was closed it was clearly communicated to a resident what action had been taken. He noted that there was a plan to conduct more in-depth surveys with residents after their cases were closed which aimed to reduce repeat incidents.

In response to Councillor Osborn's question Matt Stuart agreed with the sentiment that the police could not arrest their way out of drug problems. In Norfolk there was a multi-agency public health led approach to tackling county lines. The police's enforcement strategy was to target individuals higher up the chain responsible for exploiting vulnerable individuals.

Councillor Stutely asked how police intelligence was shared with local beat officers and if they were provided with trauma informed training. In response Matt Stuart explained the process of intelligence sharing within the police which included a daily briefing session to beat officers covering key issues. In terms of county lines there were chaired operational meetings with each command district represented by a sergeant or inspector who disseminated the information back to their teams. Trauma informed training was delivered across the police. This was a work in progress and conversations were still needed to understand the issue better, it was important to provide support to local beat officers as they were the front face of policing.

In response to Councillor Driver's question the acting community safety manager explained that community safety was everyone in the council's responsibility. Case reviews were held to tackle complex cases with members of different teams across the council represented. There was also coordination across a wider group of external agencies such as police, support agencies, mental health and drug and alcohol agencies.

Councillor Driver noted that ASB seemed to be entrenched in some areas and asked how this could be tackled. The acting community safety manager responded that if a neighbourhood had a history of particular problems then work was undertaken with the allocations team to ensure careful lets of void properties. He emphasised that local residents should continue to report issues.

In response to Councillor Thomas' (Va) question regarding the community safety fund, the acting community safety manager highlighted that the fund had purchased alley gates which had been installed resulting in a reduction in the number of burglaries in these areas.

Councillor Thomas (Vi) asked if the cuts to the adult social services supporting people budget were affecting people managing their tenancies successfully and

leading to more evictions. The acting community safety manager observed that it was difficult to tell, he noted that awareness of cuckooing had increased amongst council staff and there was information on the council's website. He emphasised that with diminishing resources it was more important for agencies to work together.

In response to Councillor Thomas' (Vi) supplementary question the acting community safety manager replied that in terms of the cost of living crisis, the council's specialist support team worked in a preventative way providing support to residents to manage their tenancies. The council was working on an early intervention model to identify problems early before they spiralled out of control.

Councillor Young noted that cannabis had medicinal properties that prescribed drugs could not match leaving patients to choose between expensive private prescriptions and street drugs. She asked if the committee would agree to ask the Clinical Commissioning Group to evaluate research on cannabis and allow G.Ps to prescribe it. The Executive Director of Community Services agreed to forward the question to the appropriate body.

In response to Councillor Kidman's question regarding staff wellbeing, the acting community safety manager agreed the complexity of cases were increasing and to ensure staff wellbeing regular one to ones were conducted and opportunities for reflective practice provided. Staff also attended trauma informed training sessions.

Councillor Osborn noted that there had been an increase in crime between the hours of 16:00 and 19:00 when young people were not at school and not yet at home. In response Matt Stuart highlighted that teams within the police such as the operational partnership team worked with other agencies to provide support to vulnerable individuals.

Councillor Galvin commented that county lines gangs were now operating out of Norfolk rather than London and asked what the drivers of this were and how it was being addressed. Matt Stuart emphasised that criminals would adapt to situations, and some types of crime would become embedded. Issues of poverty and deprivation were often the drivers and was why a multi-agency approach was so important. He emphasised again the strategic police approach was to target those responsible for the county line and most responsible for the risks and harms associated with it. He noted that county lines was a national issue and regular joint working with other police authorities especially the metropolitan police took place.

Councillor Carlo asked if the committee could receive an update on the following recommendations the scrutiny committee made at its meeting in September 2018.

- 1) liaise with contractors to provide front line staff with training on safeguarding and awareness of County Lines and that there is a process for reporting incidents to contribute to intelligence gathering;
- 2) provide Norwich City Council Councillors with training on safeguarding and awareness of County Lines and that there is a process for reporting incidents to contribute to intelligence gathering;
- 3) following consultation with the police, that the council explores the removal of tags which demarcate the territories of drug gangs;



- 4) review the licensing policy and procedures to ensure that County Lines' activity is captured particularly in relation to the fit and proper test in relation to licences for private hire drivers and hackney carriage drivers; and
- 5) review tenancy agreements and procedures for rapid response to County Lines' activities and treatment of vulnerable tenants "cuckooed" by criminals.

She considered that if she reported issues about drugs in relation to a particular tenant she was not briefed with an overview on the drug situation in her ward. In response the acting community safety manager referred to the councillor enquiry process and advised he was happy to respond to any question regarding concerns in a relation to a ward but could not divulge particular names or addresses. In response to a member question on how councillors could help he advised a County Lines Engagement Strategy was being developed which could address this. Further the council's Community Safety Strategy (CSS) was being developed which would include elements on anti-social behaviour, the night time economy and domestic abuse. The CSS would be consulted on later in the year and would include an opportunity for members to be engaged. Members could help by providing support to local beat officers and reporting any concerns they had through appropriate channels.

In response to Councillor Driver's question Matt Stuart reflected that how quickly the police responded to information depended on the information received. The police had a robust process for assessing intelligence, the credibility, providence and impact of acting on it was considered. He reassured members that the public could provide information in confidence and highlighted the difference between intelligence and evidence, intelligence information was anonymised.

**RESOLVED to:**

- 1) note the update on county lines; and
- 2) to ask the committee officer to circulate an update on the committee recommendations on county lines from the scrutiny committee meeting held in September 2018.

**4. Report from the Norfolk Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (NHOSC)**

An update from the NHOSC meeting held on 14 July had been circulated to members and the update from the meeting held on the 8 September 2022 would be circulated before the next committee.

**RESOLVED to:**

- 1) note the update from the representative on the Norfolk Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee; and
- 2) ask the representative on NHOSC to circulate a written report to scrutiny committee members for the meeting held on 8 September 2022.

## **5. Scrutiny Committee work programme 2022-23**

Members discussed the work programme. The Head of Legal and Procurement advised that the committee officer had been unable to contact UK100 to confirm attendance at the committee scheduled for 10 November 2022 on Green Financing. She proposed that the meeting on 10 November be deferred until 17 November when officers were available to present the debt advice item which was unable to go ahead as scheduled due to the death of Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II.

The item on Levelling Up was scheduled for January 2023. The council had made two bids to the Levelling Up fund but the outcome of the bids was anticipated to be delayed. Similarly, the timetable on legalisation for the Levelling Up Act was also delayed. The direction of the scrutiny committee would be driven by these factors and it was suggested that the item be rescheduled as the first item for the new civic year, to be heard in June 2023. The committee in January could then be used for the item on Green Financing with the hope that UK100 could be contacted to attend the committee.

Regarding the work programme item in March 2023 on refugees, members were asked to consider the scope of this item ready to discuss at the next committee meeting.

Members discussed the Community Safety Strategy (CSS) and the possibility of scheduling an extra committee to consider the item. The Executive Director of Community Services advised the CSS would be ready to be considered by February 2023 and if committee endorsed the item an extra meeting could be scheduled.

### **RESOLVED** to:

- 1) note the suggestions on amending the work programme for consideration at the next committee meeting; and
- 2) agree deferring the 10 November committee to 17 November to hear the item on debt advice.

CHAIR



## **Scrutiny Committee**

**16:30 to 18:35**

**17 November 2022**

**Present:** Councillors Wright (chair), Brociek-Coulton (vice chair), Carlo, Champion (substitute for Osborn), Driver, Fulton-McAlister (M), Haynes (substitute for Galvin), Padda, Stutely, Thomas (Va), Thomas (Vi) and Young

**Apologies:** Councillors Galvin, Huntley and Osborn

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

### **1. Declarations of interest**

Councillor Thomas (Va) declared an other interest in relation to item 5 (below) in that he was employed by Norfolk Community Law Service.

### **2. Update from the NHOSC representative**

The chair referred to the update of the NHOSC meeting held on 8 November 2022 which had been circulated to members and asked if this could be included in the next agenda.

#### **RESOLVED to:**

- 1) note the update of the NHOSC meeting held on 8 September 2022; and
- 2) to ask the committee officer to include the update from the NHOSC meeting held on 10 November 2022 in the agenda for the next meeting of the scrutiny committee.

### **3. Resignation of the council's representative and substitute on NCCSPSSP**

The chair noted that this item had been amended in that it was only the current substitute for the committee Councillor Stutely who was resigning and sought nominations for the position.

**RESOLVED** to appoint Councillor Fulton-McAlister (M) as the council's substitute representative for the Norfolk Countywide Community Safety Partnership Scrutiny Sub Panel.

#### **4. Resignation of the substitute NHOSC representative**

The chair noted that Councillor Stutely was resigning and sought nominations for the position.

**RESOLVED** to appoint Councillor Fulton-McAlister (M) as the council's substitute representative for the Norfolk Health and Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

#### **5. Update on debt advice and support services**

(This item was taken first)

Councillor Waters, the leader of the council introduced the item. He noted that the focus of the report was on the actions the council took to prevent and alleviate debts for households. The report highlighted the circumstances of individuals in debt and the increasing complexity of the debt landscape. The report detailed how the council, working in conjunction with partner agencies, was responding to the situation.

Members received a presentation on debt and support services from the head of strategy, engagement and culture (appended to these minutes).

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

The head of revenues and benefits emphasised the importance of joint working across teams within the council. She noted that more people were falling into debt due to the increase in the cost of living. She had observed a change whereby individuals were increasingly open and honest and shared their difficulties such as mental health issues which meant they could be referred for appropriate support. She referred to the council's non-commercial debt policy and how it operated in practice. Complex case strategy meetings were called where internal council teams and external partners working with a household met to discuss how to progress a case. Ownership of actions were agreed and this prevented duplicate working and provided a more integrated approach for households.

The head of revenues and benefits provided two case studies. First, a case where an individual owed £6,000 in Council Tax arrears and £7,000 in rent arrears. A complex case strategy meeting was held with colleagues from council tax and housing and an interpreter. Housing were assisting the individual with gaining settled status. The customer's first language wasn't English which helped to explain why there had been a lack of contact with services. A council tax reduction form was completed and applied for with the individual referred to the council's money advice team for further support. An attachment to earning in relation to the debt could be secured if needed in future.

The second case study detailed a case whereby a person had fallen into debt due to an overpayment of £7,000 council tax reduction and £20,000 housing benefit. The individual had not declared their income which was over the capital threshold for these benefits. The service maintained regular contact with the individual and advised once his capital was below £16,000 he could reclaim benefits.

The head of revenues and benefits highlighted that the council worked closely with the Financial Inclusion Consortium (FIC). The FIC incorporated a number of social welfare agencies which provided advice on debt and other issues. This work had increased the understanding of council officers on the impact of debt on individuals especially the elderly and children. The council worked closely with the Department for Work and Pensions to share issues and ideas. She noted that the benefits and revenues department had provided support to many businesses as well as individuals.

She referred to the introduction of legislation which allowed those in debt to apply for a breathing space period of 60 days when no action to recover debt was taken. This had been successful but was sometimes not long enough for individuals to get the appropriate advice and support they needed. She highlighted that the revenues and benefits service were looking to go out to community settings such as foodbanks and cafes in the new year to conduct surgeries to offer support, maximise income and signpost to services.

She noted that during the Covid-19 pandemic the courts were closed and an extra 'soft' reminder had been introduced to the council's debt recovery process which gave longer for households to pay.

She highlighted that her team had been responsible for making energy rebate payments to customers and that the outcome of the detail of the autumn budget might include payments to those not on traditional forms of energy.

Internally a debt panel had been introduced which heads of service attended to share good practice and it was hoped that the commercial debt policy would be introduced in the New Year. The council were signed up to the Citizens Advice Protocol and were working to look at the layout and fonts of letters. They were seeking to amend bills so it was clearly shown what stage of debt process an individual was at and what would happen if no payment was made.

Finally, the department were looking to develop systems to enable residents to go online and make their own payment arrangements, this would be a useful mechanism for those who did not want to contact the council directly.

The interim tenancy services and income manager addressed committee, he advised he had two key roles, to ensure people were living in council stock well and were able to manage their tenancy and secondly maintaining rent income collection. He was mindful with housing debt of the circumstances of the individual and he noted that many were new to debt as a result of the current economic situation.

It was important to consider the council's approach to the individual but more widely, to contact as many people as possible, considerately and respectfully offering advice. He was keen to introduce new ways of engaging with people via technology, in that those who were able to could self-serve. He referred to the council's specialist team of budgeting and money advisors, budgeting advisors provided advice on how to manage income, reducing outgoings and how to prioritise debts. Money advisors could provide information on how to increase income through grants or benefit applications.

These teams had seen an increase of 20% in referrals this year and had increased the average weekly income of residents by £24 whilst decreasing their expenditure by £11 per week. In terms of the impact on individuals with rent arrears approximately £400 reduction per case had been achieved. This protected against the risk of potential eviction and reduced overall debt.

The income and rents manager referred to the impact of Covid-19 upon income collection rates, legislation to pause evictions due to rent arrears came into place. Income officers temporary became support workers, they quickly learned the detail of new support funds in place, kept up to date with the changing benefit situation and created a digital library resource. This resulted in the provision of useful advice to tenants. Many customers contacted in this period that were new to debt, they had been furloughed and had limited or no income.

The learning meant that when income officers returned to rent collection work they took the new skills with them and worked in a more holistic way. The team worked closely with other teams, holding complex case strategy meetings. The lessons learnt during Covid-19 would be helpful with the current cost of living crisis. There was a balance to achieve between helping customers and collecting rent.

The service had worked with the Department of Works and Pensions to create partnership support provision sessions similar to the idea of a jobs fair. This had proved a useful learning exercise for all partners on what is available and where customers could be signposted to. One question being looked at was more empowerment for customers to self serve using appropriate technology.

The income team were seeking to speak to more people and caseloads had doubled in the last year. A large part of this increase was from those new to debt and this cohort were keen to self serve but were unsure where to go. Income officers were having quicker conversations with these customers agreeing repayment plans which were then reviewed after three months.

She referred to two case studies, the first where an income officer was working with a tenant who had recently changed over to Universal Credit and was struggling to budget. The income officer helped them to access a Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) and provided education about budgeting. Working with the income officer the customer reduced their rent arrears from £1,800 to £295. The tenant was confident that their budget was now under control and that they could manage going forward.

The team had adopted an early intervention approach, contacting those in debts earlier. The second case study detailed how a customer in £300 rent arrears was contacted by an income officer. It transpired during the conversation that the tenant was paying water rates directly to the council and to Anglia Water as well. This resulted in a £1,500 refund to the customer.

The chair shared members desire to thank the senior financial inclusion officer for the report and her work in the field.

In response to a member question the income and rents manager said she was working closely with the new DWP partnership manager and could raise the issue of

the 60 day breathing space not providing enough time for customers to engage with support.

In response to a member question the head of revenues and benefits confirmed that the non commercial debt policy was followed and there were a number of stages which had to occur before enforcement agents were used and other options could be considered such as attachments to earning or benefits. She emphasised that the number of cases passed to enforcement agents was minimal. However, it might be the first time a household engaged in any form of contact regarding their debt. If the enforcement agent discovered a household had a particular vulnerability the case was referred back to the council.

In response to a member question in relation to who got benefits in a particular household, the head of revenues and benefits confirmed it was the claimant. She referred to fraud cases where it transpired a claimant was funding their alcohol dependency and not paying bills. The head of strategy, engagement and culture noted that teams across the council spoke regularly, to share knowledge and issues were identified earlier.

In response to a member question the head of revenues and benefits noted that customers were not always willing to engage in face to face appointments but if possible they often proved more beneficial. In terms of people moving from debt advice to recovery it could be because of how a person viewed their debts and which debts they were prioritising. Council teams and partners more widely had adopted a no wrong door approach to strengthen the council's early intervention work and engage with debtors sooner. If debts were allowed to increase this was not ultimately helpful and there had to be equitable treatment of those who paid.

The chair noted that the energy rebate scheme was a challenge given to local authorities by central government. He was concerned about information he had received indicating that non direct debit Council Taxpayers had not been able to access these rebates. The head of revenues and benefits advised that if the council did not hold the bank details for the council tax holder the resident had to apply directly for the rebate.

The council had undertaken social media campaigns encouraging customers to apply but it was noted that some people were concerned about sharing their bank details. As the scheme was closing for those council tax account holders the team could not contact the rebate was placed on their council tax account. If a person was receiving full council tax support they could ask for a refund.

In response to a member question on the root causes of debt, the interim tenancy services and income manager noted there was a lag of impact on household finances from Covid-19, tied in with the removal of £20 uplift in benefits which had been paid out during the pandemic. The head of revenues and benefits suggested the Financial Inclusion Consortium had greater insight on why households fell into debt and anecdotally she suggested that those who were just about managing had been pushed into debt due to the increase in the cost of living.

Councillor Waters referred to the work of the resolution foundation and the assessment that if benefits had been maintained at 2010 levels then 2m less people would have been pushed into poverty or become highly vulnerable.

The income and rents manager advised that the team had begun to collect data in June on the reasons people were not paying their rent and the two biggest reasons given were higher electric bills and inappropriate budget. The later was a term used when it was considered that there was an incorrect prioritisation of household income such as funding a car that was not needed to access work or education. Part of this work also revealed that whilst lump sums paid off debt for example from DHP were beneficial in reducing headline debt it did not change behaviour. A process of working with an advisor to create and maintain a budget often had better long-term impacts because the householder was educated on how to manage their finances.

In response to a member question the interim tenancy services and income manager noted there had been a 20% increase in debt cases. In order to be able to advise larger numbers of households self-serve options were being considered.

In response to a member question the income and rents manager said the income team's knowledge and skills were growing because of joint working through complex case strategy meetings. Coordinating work across teams in the council prevented more cases of evictions. The head of revenues and benefits emphasised the cross team working which was taking place. At a wider level the head of strategy, engagement and culture referred to work with the FIC sharing information which had resulted in improved processes.

In relation to a question on flags which were used on customers records to indicate a vulnerability the head of strategy, engagement and culture advised that flags were attached to the individual and not the debt to enable conversations across council teams.

In response to a member question the income and rents manager advised communication styles were varied as standard with customers, at the sign up for the tenancy a householder would be asked their preferred means of communication. She noted that the council were looking at smarter ways of communicating by example sending out bulk texts to phones. There was a caveat in that certain legal processes called for letters to be used but if the service were aware a customer struggled to read then attempts to hand deliver the letter would be made.

The head of revenues and benefits emphasised that her service area was constrained by legalisation, reminders had a specified letter format. However, as she had earlier alluded work to look at the accessibility of the letters was being explored.

In response to a member question the head of revenues and benefits suggested a 120 day breathing space period would be advantageous but it depended still on the ability of households to be access advice and the numbers that were in need.

In response to a member question the income and rents manager advised that since June 2022 income officers had been trialling a new way of working, this had resulted



in an increase to income recovery, more customers being spoken to and referrals to support services increasing.

In response to a member question the head of revenues and benefits emphasised that the team were looking to improve the accessibility of the letters it sent out. The head of strategy, engagement and culture noted that the council had a digital inclusion strategy and the use of digital technology could provide an innovative part of the solution.

**RESOLVED** to postpone considering recommendations in relation to an update on debt advice and support services to the next meeting of scrutiny committee.

#### **6. Scrutiny Committee work programme 2022-23**

**RESOLVED** to postpone consideration of the work programme to the next meeting of scrutiny committee.

CHAIR



# Debt Advice and Support Services

Scrutiny Committee

17 November 2022

[www.norwich.gov.uk](http://www.norwich.gov.uk)



**NORWICH**  
City Council

# Scrutiny Request

To examine the extent to which debt advice and support services provided by the Council and its partners are helping to prevent people from falling into debt and becoming subject to debt recovery

# Corporate Plan 2022 - 26

## Aim 1

**People live independently and well in a diverse, and safe city.**

Through our policy on non-commercial debt, ensure we take a consistent approach across service areas in how we support people to manage their debt – ongoing

## Aim 4

**An inclusive economy in which residents have equal opportunity to flourish.**

Recommission social welfare advice and support for residents in financial hardship – April 2022

# Four Focus areas

- Non-Commercial Debt Policy
- Debt Respite Scheme
- Social welfare advice
- Council debt support and advice

# Non-commercial Debt Policy

- Agreed by Cabinet in October 2020 to ensure the council maximises the collection of debts and income and reduces the likelihood of financial hardship for customers by ensuring individuals' financial circumstances are considered on a case-by-case basis.
- Key aims include:
  - Improve income collection rates by treating debtors reasonably and fairly
  - Recognise the varying causes of debt and adjust recovery procedures accordingly
  - Reduce the likelihood of financial hardship for customers by ensuring individuals' financial circumstances are considered on a case-by-case basis
  - Enable the signposting of debtors to debt advice as appropriate

# Non-commercial Debt Policy cont'd

The policy includes:

- A separate section dedicated to the treatment of vulnerable customers
- Introduction of the Standard Financial Statement as approved by the money advice service detailing all income and expenditure
- Embedding Citizens Advice council tax protocol into the policy
- Implementing 60-day Debt Respite Scheme prior to the legislation coming into force (In May 2021)
- Highlighting the importance of advice agencies

# Non-commercial Debt Policy – in practice

- Introduction of a new debt management flag for when we know the person may need more support to manage their debt.
- Officers working together to look at individuals' needs around housing, council tax, health and vulnerabilities and identifying possible solutions.
- The standard financial statement (SFS) is now being used by all relevant service areas.
- Successful implementation of the Debt Respite scheme.
- Positive collaborative working across multiple teams.



## Non-commercial Debt Policy – impacts

- Our most vulnerable customers are beginning to experience a 'no wrong door approach'.
- Sharing knowledge has led to increased opportunities for improved outcomes.
- Total of 433 council tax accounts in the vulnerable recovery profile.
- Money and budget advice team was supporting 276 tenants in quarter 1 of 2022/23, of which 85 were new cases.

# Debt Respite scheme

- Introduced May 2021 – the council had been following its principles from October 2020
- It enables those struggling with debt to be placed into a 60 day “breathing space” during which all qualifying debts are placed on hold and no further action can take place.
- The debt advice provider has a period of 60 days to work with the debtor to find a sustainable solution to help them manage their debts. This could be a debt management plan, a debt relief order, or an individual voluntary arrangement.

# Debt Respite scheme - in practice

- Normally enacted by an advice provider making a request via the Insolvency Service portal but our money advisers can place people into breathing space.
- When a breathing space request is received all service areas are notified to hold recovery and a debt management flag is placed on the document management system
- Up until the 11 August 2022 we have had 97 breathing space cases - 19 resulted in a formal debt solution for the debtor but most cases have not resulted in sustainable solutions within the 60 days
- Concerns regarding lack of outcomes within 60 days have been raised with the Money and Pensions Service at local level but have not yet been resolved.

# Social Welfare Advice

- The council has recommissioned the provision of information, advice and advocacy services for residents for the next two years with the intention of a further one-year extension.
- Early intervention and advice is key to ensuring that people get the help and support that they need as soon as they need it.
- 2022-23 grant was £171,704.
- The current Financial inclusion consortium is made up of Norfolk community law service (the lead agency) Shelter Norfolk citizens advice . Age UK Norwich, Mancroft Advice Project Equal Lives The Bridge Plus

# Financial Inclusion Consortium purpose

The priority for the service provision is to ensure that poverty is reduced by delivering:

- a. Ongoing and increasing capacity to prevent or mitigate crises and increase financial resilience for a wide range of residents
- b. Visible, easy to access, free advice
- c. Services that are not restricted to specific cohorts, but which can respond quickly to changing situations and to the needs of individuals who may be newly financially vulnerable
- d. Advice services that can meet the needs of residents who are vulnerable, including those experiencing mental health issues, and EU citizens facing status issues

# Financial Inclusion Consortium purpose

- e. An increased awareness of available advice - Services that can inform people of eligibility at key trigger points and take information into communities achieving effective and creative engagement
- f. Holistic wraparound support with time to understand the full picture and level of need and able to recognise the advantages of a consortium model – shared support, collaborative approach, a no wrong door approach
- g. Quality and independent advice, which integrates multiple levels of information, advice and advocacy across debt, welfare benefits, housing, and wider financial capability with effective pathways into wider public and VCSE provision
- h. Effective data and insight that shows how needs are evolving and demonstrates the impact of the service

# Financial Inclusion Consortium impact

April 2018 to March 2021:

- improved the financial wellbeing of over 19,000 Norwich citizens by reducing debt (renegotiating/writing off) to the value of almost £7,000,000
- increased income (welfare benefit appeals/applications) by more than £8,000,000.

It has achieved this by providing easy access to a wide range of expert information, advice, advocacy, and representation through the Norfolk Community Advice Network (NCAN) partnership.

The FIC also works with the council to identify changes we can make, to ensure continuous improvement of our services

# Council Debt Support and Advice

- Multiple teams working with residents around debt, housing, welfare benefits, financial, or other types of support
- Revenues and Benefit team work closely with the financial inclusion officer
- Specialist support team support tenants to manage a healthy tenancy, for the long term
- Build rapport and safe working relationships with tenants
- Well established budgeting and money advice service for tenants



# Council Debt Support and Advice - in practice

- First Norfolk authority to start paying Energy Rebate Scheme to eligible households
- Specialist support team supports 225 tenants in a year, with 75% in financial hardship
- Post specialist support tenancies are monitored at 4 and 12 months
- Money and budget advisors work to find sustainable solutions
- Deficit budgets are becoming more common
- Continue to fund and use NCAN referral system

# Outcomes for Money and Budget Advice

**2021/22**

<b>Estimated total value of support to households</b>	<b>£559,563.89</b>
Estimated annual income increase	£372,730.80
Estimated annual outgoing decrease	£91,301.60
Estimated annual one-off financial support	£95,531.49

*This does not reflect all help allocated/awarded so estimated value of support will be much higher*

# Cost of Living

NIESR has projected that across UK there will be a:

- 31% increase in the number of households becoming classed as destitute because of the current cost of living crisis.
- estimated 14,600 households may be unable to buy basic necessities in Norfolk (2,290 households in Norwich) which includes approximately 11,140 households that may already be affected by destitution (1,750 households in Norwich).
- 13.2% of households in Norwich are fuel poor (Department for Businesses, Energy & Industrial Strategy (BEIS), 2022)

NCAN has set out their concerns relating to food, fuel, mental health and basic living standards with following examples from their caseload:

- 405% increase in average value of secured loans debt owed per person from £1,151 to £5,821
- Significant increase in those needing help with debt assessments and a similar increase in demand for charitable support and foodbank parcels
- Three times as many young people presenting to them as homeless
- 68% increase in direct referrals from this time last year



## **NHOSC meeting at County Hall on Thursday November 10 2022**

Item 5

### **NHS England and NHS Improvement Report for General Dental Services (Norfolk and Waveney).**

A key item was the issue of dentistry provision in the county. Members of the Committee and I we asked why was it that the local schools were not visited anymore to try and find out what children needed to have work done, but also to make sure that the children are shown how to clean their teeth properly and to show what happens if they don't keep their teeth clean.

We were told that Special Education Needs schools were on the school list to have school visits, and we asked the team if you're still looking into your strategy and looking at prevention and school oral needs. They also said that Norfolk County Council were the authority that looked after the school dentistry and that the NHSEI had been given monies to do this. So, we they were taking away that they would look into what they could do for schools in our districts, to see if children's oral health could be fitted into their plan, maybe they should actually ask our schools rather than people who are telling them what they think is best for our children's health.

They are looking at DCP (Dental Clinical Prevention) which is where nurse practitioners could take on some of the jobs of the dentists. One dentist attended the meeting and spoke saying that one of the Long Stratton dentists had closed (one he owned years ago) and he had asked if he could buy it again and had no response at all. The committee did ask why was this when you had someone ready to take it on, why hadn't there been a response to him.

Even though lots of us had had loads of emails and phone calls from residents who just can't get on a waiting list or get an appointment. We were told that there isn't such a thing as a waiting list for dentistry but many of us in the meeting said we were on such a waiting list. Our residents have been told to call 111 for assistance only to find that the dentist they call is full and can't help them.

We did ask about having a dentistry school in Norwich and Kings Lynn as there was info that it would cost 20 million to have one in Norwich at the University hospital. But the officer from the NHSEI said it would take 10 to 11 years to create this and that it took 5 years to become a Dentist so in the short term this wasn't the answer

They had also been doing a primary care pilot to improve oral health care for residents in care home and this was done in April 2022. I've asked that this is brought back to NHOSC when it I completed so we can see how many care homes are actually looking at the oral health of older people.

Also, by January the four Commissioned additional NHS practices in Norfolk and Waveney will start being open 8-8pm 365 days a year. These are:  
Kings Lynn Norfolk – Smile care Norfolk Limited  
Kings Lynn Norfolk – Smile Care Norfolk Limited  
Norwich Norfolk – Smile Care Norfolk Limited  
Lowestoft – Suffolk Dental Design Studio Limited.

Lastly, we were told it isn't so much that there is a shortage of dentists but the fact that the government doesn't pay the dentist correctly because the contract isn't right for dentists.

## **Norfolk and Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust**

Stuart Richardson the CEO of the Trust told us that they had started to hold themselves into account and had been learning from Queen Elizabeth Hospital looking how to fix the problems that the users are looked after.

They told us that there were additional things they were doing for their staff due to the cost-of-living crisis and how hard it is for them at the present time.

- The lower banding staff were finding ways to support people.
- They were supported increased mileage allowance.
- Every band 2-5 were receiving £150 of super market vouchers.
- Pool cars were being used more effectively to release workers using their own cars.
- And people can sell annual leave after their 22 days leave and 6 days bank holidays.

They also said they were working with network partners so that people who might need wellbeing could be signposted elsewhere.

### **People on the wards**

We were told that people are not being discharged into B&Bs they are staying in the ward until they can be released in to a sufficient place which is an appropriate accommodation

### **Agency and bank staff**

The team were asked about Agency and Bank staff and we told they all have an induction.

### **Staff**

There are always lots of people leaving their jobs, so staff retention is one of the top priorities. People were leaving because of bullying at work also. The new induction that they have in place supports their staff and centres around their needs. And they are encouraging people to report abuse whenever it happens. When people leave, they are having someone from the top team sit in and try and find out why they are leaving – quite intimidating I would imagine. They are also managing a new monthly star award where colleagues can put people in to gain an award. In the last month 150 people have put people forward for this award.

### Assessments

We asked about why were assessment being done on the phone. Surely you cant see how the person is feeling as you can't see them. The officer from NSFT said that they always encourage face to face but, if that cant be done then by Skype. Making sure that some one from their family or friend is with them.

Januarys NHOSC topic is Menopause if you have any questions let me know. There will be another topic as well but it hasn't come on the forward plan as yet.

Julie BC







**Committee Name: Scrutiny**

**Committee Date: 08/12/2022**

**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:**

It is recommended that members consider and approve changes to the scrutiny committee work programme 2022-23

**Policy Framework**

The Council has five corporate priorities, which are:

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

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

## **Report Details**

### **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 meeting on 14 July 2022.
2. At the committee meeting held on 13 October 2022 members were asked to consider proposed changes to the work programme. The proposed work programme is attached at appendix A and members are asked to approve the proposed changes.
3. Members were asked to send suggestions for a scope for the “Welcoming Refugees into Norwich and overcoming obstacles to their smooth integration” topic to democratic services. One full scope was received from Councillor Galvin which has been circulated to scrutiny committee members and is included as appendix B. Further information relating to the scope of this meeting has been received from Councillor Carlo and is also included as appendix B. Members are asked to discuss and agree this scope so that initial work can commence.
4. A topic form has been received from Councillor Lubbock proposing that the committee consider; Scrutiny of the Customer Contact Centre and its responsiveness to residents’ telephone calls. This is included as appendix C. Members are asked to consider if they would like to schedule the topic for a meeting of the committee.
5. At the meeting of committee on 13 October 2022, members suggested considering the council’s Community Safety Strategy which is in the process of being developed. Members are asked to decide if they would like to schedule an extraordinary meeting of the Committee to be scheduled at a date that is mutually agreeable for members and officers.

### **Recurring items**

6. 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), pre-scrutiny of the proposed budget (February) and the annual review of the scrutiny committee (March).
7. 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**

8. 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.

9. 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.

## **Consultation**

10. Members of the scrutiny committee were consulted on the proposed 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**

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.

11. 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**

12. No specific legal implications of this report.

## **Statutory Considerations**

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

## **Risk Management**

<b>Risk</b>	<b>Consequence</b>	<b>Controls Required</b>
None		

## **Other Options Considered**

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

**Reasons for the decision/recommendation**

14. 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

Appendix B – Scope of the refugee item and additional information received.

Appendix C – Scope received in relation to Scrutiny of the Customer Contact Centre and its responsiveness to residents' telephone calls

**Contact Officer:**

**Name:** Alex Hand

Telephone number: 01603 989398

Email address: [alexhand@norwich.gov.uk](mailto:alexhand@norwich.gov.uk)

<b>Date</b>	<b>Report</b>	<b>Purpose</b>	<b>Portfolio Holder + Senior Officer + Report author</b>
17/11/2022	Debt advice and support and debt recovery	To examine the extent to which debt advice and support services provided by the council and its partners are helping to prevent people from falling into debt and becoming subject to debt recovery	Cllr Waters Annabel Scholes Tanya Bandekar Nicki Bristow
17/11/2022	Work programme	To review the scrutiny committee work programme	Cllr Kendrick Lou Rawsthorne Lucy Palmer
17/11/2022	Updates from NHOSC and NCCSPSSP	To receive a report from council's representative on NHOSC and NCCSPSSP	Cllr Kendrick Lou Rawsthorne Lucy Palmer
08/12/2022	NRL Business Plan	To consider the NRL Business Plan	Cllr Waters Graham Nelson Dave Shaw
08/12/2022	NCSL Business Plan	To consider the NCSL Business Plan	Cllr Waters Lou Rawsthorne / Graham Nelson Hannah Leys
08/12/2022	Equality information report	To consider the annual equality information report	Cllr Waters Lou Rawsthorne Ramona Herdman
08/12/2022	Work programme	To review the scrutiny committee work programme	Cllr Kendrick Lou Rawsthorne Lucy Palmer
08/12/2022	Updates from NHOSC and NCCSPSSP	To receive a report from council's representative on NHOSC and NCCSPSSP	Cllr Kendrick Lou Rawsthorne Lucy Palmer
19/01/2023	Financing for renewable energy/energy efficiency	To consider a report on "financing for renewable energy/energy efficiency"	Cllr Kendrick Annabel Scholes Neville Murton
19/01/2023	Corporate Plan refresh	To consider the Corporate Plan	Lou Rawsthorne Helen Chamberlin
19/01/2023	Work programme	To review the scrutiny committee work programme	Cllr Kendrick Lou Rawsthorne Lucy Palmer
19/01/2023	Updates from	To receive a report from	Cllr Kendrick

## Appendix A

<b>Date</b>	<b>Report</b>	<b>Purpose</b>	<b>Portfolio Holder + Senior Officer + Report author</b>
	NHOSC and NCCSPSSP	council's representative on NHOSC and NCCSPSSP	Lou Rawsthorne Lucy Palmer
02/02/2023	Pre-scrutiny of the budget	To pre-scrutinise the budget	Cllr Kendrick Annabel Scholes Neville Murton
02/02/2023	Work programme	To review the scrutiny committee work programme	Cllr Kendrick Lou Rawsthorne Lucy Palmer
02/02/2023	Updates from NHOSC and NCCSPSSP	To receive a report from council's representative on NHOSC and NCCSPSSP	Cllr Kendrick Lou Rawsthorne Lucy Palmer
16/03/2023	Annual Review of scrutiny committee	To consider the annual scrutiny committee report	Cllr Kendrick Lou Rawsthorne Lucy Palmer
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
16/03/2023	Updates from NHOSC and NCCSPSSP	To receive a report from council's representative on NHOSC and NCCSPSSP	Cllr Kendrick Lou Rawsthorne Lucy Palmer
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: Welcoming refugees into Norwich and overcoming obstacles to their smooth integration including that of the impact of the governments stated 'hostile environment' agenda and removal of support to agencies tasked to assist them.**

**BRIEF SCOPE: Norwich is proud to be a welcoming city which has provided refuge to people fleeing persecution for hundreds of years. In recent years the city council has provided, working with partners, sanctuary to people from Syria, Afghanistan and recently Ukraine with public interest and support for this. However, efforts to undertake this have existed alongside the governments stated hostile environment agenda and criminalisation of refugees. This scrutiny review will examine the work on the city council in this area and help to make any recommendations for how it be improved.**

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
<b>TIME</b> Is this the right time to review the issue?	There has been significant focus and media attention on the situation in Ukraine and mass exodus of civilians to neighbouring countries. Continued conflict in Europe, and in other parts of the world, make it likely that Britain and our city will receive refugees fleeing persecution.	
<b>OBJECTIVE</b> What would be the	Investigate how the city council works with partners to support those re-settling in the city and the impact of	

objective of scrutiny? How do you feel scrutiny could make a difference?	wider government policy changes together with funding reductions have made this harder. It can provide important recommendations to both the council and the city's Members of Parliament.	
<b>PERFORMANCE</b> Can performance in this area be improved by scrutiny input?	Helping to create welcoming, tolerant and sustainable communities remains a key objective for the city council and is measured against different indicators. Refugees represent potentially some of the most vulnerable people in our community and helping to ensure they are successfully integrated into our city will be a priority.	
<b>PUBLIC INTEREST</b> what would be the public interest in placing this topic onto the work programme?	Communities in the city have expressed support for refugees, most recently those from Ukraine, and there will interest and benefit to improving the understanding around what role the city council can take to assist in this.	
<b>CONTRIBUTION</b> How would a scrutiny review contribute to achieving our corporate aims?	It is a corporate priority to create strong and sustainable communities which are inclusive of all.	

### Practical Considerations:

<b>Undertaking the review</b>  Have you got any thoughts about how the scrutiny committee could undertake their review?	Take evidence from appropriate partners including groups which work closely with refugees in Norwich and the testimony of refugees themselves living in the city. This could lead to recommendations to
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	government and other agencies.
Would there be specific individuals, such as outside organisations, who could provide evidence or would need to be engaged in the review?	Appropriate officers, partners and voluntary and statutory services.
Do you believe consultation with particular groups would be helpful to support the review?	Partners in the voluntary volunteer together with the People from Abroad Team which offers a specialist social work service.
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?	
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?	This issue is routinely raised with appropriate officers.

Please return your form to Alex Hand, senior committee officer; alexhand@norwich.gov.uk

Thank you.

Further suggestions on scope for the Refugees scrutiny item was received from Cllr Carlo as below:

1. Food and food poverty and how city agencies can ensure that the specific needs of the many different ethnic and religious groups are catered for? For example, the Food Bank has received requests from Ukraine refugees for fresh beetroots and potatoes but it did not have these items in stock at the time. Requests for particular foods will also apply in other instances, Halal foods for example.
2. Access to Broadband and IT – individual refugees and asylum seekers need broadband access for contacting their lawyers, friends and family in their home country and accessing any services but paying for broadband from their modest support payments is difficult. Norwich City Council gave funding to New Routes for Broadband support from the first round of the Household Support Fund (HSF) for distributing to individuals, but the second round of the HSF does not provide for this type of funding. The City Council says that the Norfolk Assistance Scheme considers Broadband as an essential bill and so individual families can apply through this route. Nonetheless a quicker route for individuals and people living in multiple occupancy dwellings is via New Routes. Access to IT equipment such as Smartphones is also an issue.



# 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:** Scrutiny of the Customer Contact Centre and its responsiveness to residents' telephone calls.

**BRIEF SCOPE:** Identify through our telephony system the extent of the problem of calls going unanswered, explore the service areas which are causing the high demand and deal with the findings to improve the experience of those who cannot contact the council any other way than by using the telephone.

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
<b>TIME</b> Is this the right time to review the issue?	First question to the Portfolio Holder was asked in June and a second in October. Both answers were the same – high demand, vacancies, training of staff etc. Residents need answers to their problems at this very difficult time and problems get worse if not dealt with quickly. Increase in casework for councillors as a result of not being able to contact the council.	Identifying which are the service areas in demand and questioning why. Recruiting more staff and retaining them, or temporary staff. Acknowledging that not everyone can use online services and that no one now can come into city hall for help.

<b>OBJECTIVE</b> What would be the objective of scrutiny? How do you feel scrutiny could make a difference?	Explore the underlying causes of high demand from callers and understand the issues around a unresponsive Customer Contact Centre and the problems this causes for residents ie late payments	New ways of dealing with those who cannot use the online services. Triage system? Staffing Recourses
<b>PERFORMANCE</b> Can performance in this area be improved by scrutiny input?	There has been over 6 months of residents experiencing problems. Despite it being raised as an issue by councillors there has been no improvements. In dept understanding of the problem may bring improvements.	
<b>PUBLIC INTEREST</b> what would be the public interest in placing this topic onto the work programme?	To show the public that the Council care about their experiences when contacting the council and that they are looking to improve that contact.	
<b>CONTRIBUTION</b> How would a scrutiny review contribute to achieving our corporate aims?	The Council's vision 'where residents are at the heart of everything we do'. Aim 4 'The City has an inclusive economy in which residents have equal opportunity to flourish'. The council is discriminating against those who do not have access to the internet to deal with their council problems. This is often the elderly and those on low incomes.	

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**Practical Considerations:**

<b>Undertaking the review</b>  Have you got any thoughts about how the scrutiny committee could undertake their review?	Taking evidence from the officers in charge of the Customer Contact Centre and the Director under which this service falls.
Would there be specific individuals, such as outside organisations, who could provide evidence or would need to be engaged in the review?	Councillors could provide examples of their residents' frustration and consequences of not getting through to the council on the phone.
Do you believe consultation with particular groups would be helpful to support the review?	As above
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?	Outcomes that would help residents – new ways of dealing with those who rely on phones.
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?	No

Please return your form to Alex Hand, senior committee officer. [alexhand@norwich.gov.uk](mailto:alexhand@norwich.gov.uk)

Thank you.

