

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee held on Wednesday, 15 November 2023 in the Council Chamber - Council Offices at 9.30 am

Committee Members Present:	Cllr N Dixon (Chairman)	Cllr V Holliday
	Cllr N Housden	Cllr P Fisher
	Cllr L Vickers	Cllr J Boyle
	Cllr G Bull	Cllr R Macdonald
	Cllr M Hankins	
Members also attending:	Cllr H Blathwayt	Cllr C Cushing
	Cllr T Adams	Cllr P Heinrich
	Cllr L Shires	Cllr J Toye

Officers in Attendance: Chief Executive, Coastal Transition Manager, Director for Communities, Assistant Director for Finance, Assets, Legal & Monitoring Officer, Revenues Manager, Environment & Safety Manager and Director for Resources / S151 Officer

Also in attendance:

1. Serco - Regional Director and Senior Contract Manager Norfolk
2. Anglian Water – Regional Engagement Manager and Head of Quality Regulation & Enforcement

69 APOLOGIES

Cllr M Batey and Cllr S Penfold had sent apologies.

70 SUBSTITUTES

None.

71 PUBLIC QUESTIONS & STATEMENTS

None received.

72 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 11th October were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

73 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Cllr Dr V Holliday declared an interest in Agenda item 14: Council Tax Discounts & Premiums Determination 2024 – 2025. She advised the committee that she had a dispensation from the Standards Committee to take part in the debate and vote.

74 ITEMS OF URGENT BUSINESS

None received.

75 PETITIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

None received.

76 CONSIDERATION OF ANY MATTER REFERRED TO THE COMMITTEE BY A MEMBER

None received.

77 RESPONSES OF THE COUNCIL OR THE CABINET TO THE COMMITTEE'S REPORTS OR RECOMMENDATIONS

The Democratic Services Manager advised that there were no responses from Cabinet to recommendations made by the Committee.

78 WASTE AND RELATED SERVICES UPDATE

Mr P Aylward, Regional Director (RD) and Mr G Edwards' Senior Contract Manager Norfolk (SCMN), were in attendance on behalf of Serco Environmental Services.

The Chairman invited Cllr C Ringer, Portfolio Holder for IT, Environmental & Waste Services to introduce this item. Cllr Ringer explained that the report set out the recent performance of the waste contract against various collection streams. The impact of route and round reorganisation followed by industrial action earlier in the year had placed additional pressures on staff. The peak in missed bin collections occurred in March/April 2023 and was associated with the industrial action. Since this had been resolved, there had been a steady decrease in the number of missed collections.

Cllr Ringer went onto say that Serco now undertook more assisted bin collections (due to the ageing demographic in the district) which placed additional pressures on the service. Consequently, there was currently a higher level of missed collections for the assisted bin collections service. In future, there would be ongoing focus on improving these collections. Cllr Ringer reminded members that the service continued to improve and expand. A new battery collection service had been introduced earlier in the year and food waste collection was on the horizon. He said that two new vehicles were in the pipeline to support garden waste and trade waste collections. These were both 'paid for' services and brought in much needed revenue. Once the new vehicles were in place, pressure would be eased on general waste and recycling collection. He concluded by saying that the overall service was much improved and he thanked members for bringing issues to his attention and officers for their continued support. His inbox was no longer full of issues and complaints relating to waste collection, which indicated the service was moving in the right direction.

The Chairman invited the Director for Communities (DFC) to speak. He began by saying that the main focus in recent months had been on achieving a significant and sustained improvement in collection rates. He was satisfied that this was now within an acceptable range and it should be acknowledged that it would never be 100% every day. Regarding garden waste, he said that there were challenges around capacity on certain days due to both the number of collections and the volume and

weight. The added travel time to empty the vehicles impacted on the number of collections that could be completed in a day. The growth in garden waste subscriber numbers meant the rounds had reached capacity. The purchase of an additional vehicle would help ease this issue. It was the same for trade waste, with a new vehicle expected to reduce the current pressures on the service and also domestic rounds as well as supporting growth of the trade service in the future.

The DFC said that one of the main concerns of the Committee when previously considering this matter, had been around the challenges facing customers who tried to contact Serco to report problems. He said that Serco had worked hard to improve performance in this respect and moved from a position of below 50% compliance with the contract requirements at the start of the year to 90% now.

He then provided an update regarding the gap analysis, which had been a previous area of focus for the committee. The main issues had been covered in the report but in terms of outstanding issues, approximately 50% had been dealt with through a 'commercial matters' with Serco. The three authorities had agreed variations on the way in which it should be delivered and the remaining amount (about 60%) was in the process of being delivered. However, he emphasised that the bigger items were coming forward or had already been delivered. The Community Engagement Plan had been agreed by officers and it was hoped that this would be signed off at the next meeting of the Contract Review & Development Board. The Carbon Management Plan was back with the authorities now for final sign off.

The Chairman invited members to speak:

- a) Cllr P Fisher asked if any particular areas were seeing more missed bin collections than others. He referred to his own ward of Wells where there were access issues for many properties. The DFC replied that where there were access issues, a smaller vehicle was used. The SCMN (Serco) added that he was not aware of any specific issues in Wells but if there were any particular areas that needed looking at, the Cllr Fisher could contact Serco and they would address any problems.
- b) Cllr J Toye asked about the use of pesticides for grounds maintenance and whether Serco was actively working to reduce their use. The RM (Serco) replied that accurate records were kept all of pesticide use and any applications were targeted, in line with legislative requirements. He added that they were also looking at options for alternatives. The DFC added that the contract required Serco to minimise the use of pesticides. Operatives also used additional tools such as wire brushes and hoes to ensure that pesticides were used in a limited and targeted manner. Cllr Toye replied that, in the way that options around electric vehicles and hydro-treated vegetable oil (HVO) had been set out previously, he would like the same approach to be taken for pesticides.
- c) Cllr Dr V Holliday said that whilst she accepted that the overall number of missed collections had fallen, she was aware of a number of households which continued to be affected. She referred to the contact centre data and asked if the service level agreement (SLA) required any performance outcome data to be reported or just the volume of calls. The SCMN replied that the target set out in the SLA was for 90% of calls to be answered within 20 seconds. Currently, the outcome of calls was not a requirement of the SLA.

- d) Cllr N Housden referred to the gap analysis and asked whether it had moved away from the target operating model (TOM) that it had been based on originally. The DFC replied that the three authorities had met with Serco to look at the gap analysis and it was agreed that some elements were undeliverable in the way that was being specified. He gave the example of an alarm in the cab that was activated when attending an assisted collection and which the crew had to deactivate. This was not available in the current software system so was therefore not deliverable at the current time and it was agreed that it was not a priority. Some other things were 'nice to have' rather than key to service delivery, such as a camera on the waste vehicle for recording potholes. This had now been removed from the list of deliverables but all core elements had remained. He concluded by saying that he was happy to provide a copy of the gap analysis to members but they should be aware that it wasn't weighted in terms of importance.
- e) Cllr J Boyle referred to assisted collections and asked if there was any way to improve the current system which required someone to go ahead and pull out all of the required bins and then the crew to follow on and pick them up. This did not always seem to be a consistent, joined up approach and she wondered if there was a way to improve it. The RM replied that from an operational perspective, the information that was relied on to undertake assisted collections needed to be very accurate. During the period of industrial action earlier in the year, the service had relied on more agency staff and some of the knowledge of the local area was lost. Improving this still remained a focus and Serco was committed to this.
- f) Cllr C Cushing said that he was pleased to see the improvement in service delivery. He referred to page 30 of the report and the proposed reorganisation of routes and rounds in April 2024 and asked how extensive this would be. The DFC replied that it related to garden waste collection rounds due to an increase in the number of vehicles and subscriber numbers. The rounds were now out of kilter and difficult to deliver. There was currently a certain amount of co-collection on the trade waste service into domestic rounds. With the purchase of an additional vehicle, some current domestic rounds would have to be moved out and onto that additional vehicle and re-routing would help facilitate the growth of the trade waste service in the future. In terms of recycling and residual waste rounds, no plans for route changes had been shared yet. The upcoming mandatory collection of food waste needed to be taken into consideration. It had to be introduced before April 2025 for trade waste and for residential customers by April 2026. Discussions were underway as to whether this should be introduced sooner than 2026 and if this was the case, a substantial rerouting of residual and recycling waste rounds would be delayed from April 2024 to April 2025. Discussions relating to this were still in the very early stages. In conclusion, the DFC said that round changes would definitely go ahead for garden and trade waste collections but that other routes may wait. Cllr Cushing asked if there was any indication of a timescale for a costed option for food waste collection from central Government. The Environment & Safety Manager (ESM) replied that it was anticipated that capital funding would be announced by the end of the financial year but officers were making preparations now as it was likely that there would be a rush to the market for food collection containers. There would also be transitional funding to assist with the cost of re-routing and project management, as well as ongoing revenue support. No figures had been confirmed yet. The DFC added that 1st April 2026 was the 'hard' date for the introduction of domestic food waste collections, so it was

hoped that funding would be in place before then as the Council wanted to go for an earlier start if possible to avoid congestion in the market. He said there was the possibility of having work undertaken by a company, looking across the whole of Norfolk to model collection patterns.

- g) Cllr L Shires referred to s3.6 of the report and customer contact figures. She asked for clarification as to whether the requirement to answer a call within 20 seconds also included re-directs. The SCMN confirmed that it was a target of 20 seconds to pick up the call and engage with the client. Cllr Shires then asked if Serco collected data regarding staff satisfaction with the company. The SCMN replied that an annual staff survey was undertaken but the response level was low and was hindered further by the period of industrial action between March to May 2023. He said that Serco was working hard to improve on this.
- h) Cllr P Fisher commented on the use of weedkiller in Wells. He said that in some parts of the town there were benches that were very close together and it was very unsightly when the grass was sprayed and then died. He asked if this was a widespread issue across the district or limited to just one operative. The RM replied that he would look into the issue if Cllr Fisher was able to provide more information after the meeting.
- i) Cllr M Hankins said that he lived on a mixed-use residential / holiday park. There was a continual problem of people not separating their waste into residual and recycling and he wondered what could be done about this. The DFC replied that this was a matter of educating people. He said that bin calendars were provided and any contaminated bins were 'red tagged' and then not collected if the problem persisted. The ESM added that communal bins were particularly challenging and acknowledged that contamination of recycling bins had increased in recent months. Cllr Hankins said that the majority of issues were caused by visitors who did not understand local requirements or who had no interest in engaging with them. The Chairman said that it was an interesting point and although a national standard in waste bins and collection would be very helpful in addressing this problem, an international standard would be the ultimate ambition as many visitors to North Norfolk were from overseas.

The Chairman thanked everyone for their input. He asked Cllr Housden if he wished to make a formal request for the gap analysis information.

It was proposed by Cllr N Housden, seconded by Cllr Dr V Holliday and

RESOLVED

1. To note the update report
2. To request that the gap analysis for the target operating model (TOM) is circulated to Members

79 ANGLIAN WATER - SEWAGE OUTFLOWS BRIEFING

The Chairman welcomed Grant Tuffs, Regional Engagement Manager (REM) and Natasha Kenny, Head of Quality Regulation and Enforcement (HQRE) at Anglian Water to the meeting. He reminded members that questions had been submitted in advance and the written responses to these had been circulated prior to the

meeting. He therefore asked members to focus their questioning on additional points and issues, to avoid taking up too much time on matters that had already been covered. Cllr W Fredericks asked if the questions and written responses could be published on the Council's website so that the public could access them. The Democratic Services Manager agreed to action this.

The Chief Executive outlined the background to Anglian Water's attendance. He explained that concern over sewage outflows initially came to Full Council as a Notice of Motion in November 2021. Full Council made an additional recommendation to:

'Request that all sewage water discharge events are immediately reported to the Council's Environmental Health department and then consolidated into periodic reviews to be undertaken by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee. These reports should include a full review of all sewage water discharge events in North Norfolk and should require the Council and the Overview & Scrutiny to engage with Anglian Water and for them to report on the progress and investments being made.'

This was the second time Anglian Water had attended the Overview & Scrutiny Committee to provide an update and since their last visit in June 2022, the District had lost three blue flags at East Runton, Mundesley and Sea Palling which had caused considerable public concern.

The Chairman thanked the Chief Executive and invited members to speak. He reminded them that although a question had been submitted regarding water supply, this was not an area of focus for the Committee and no further questions on this would be considered.

- a) Cllr Dr V Holliday asked what was in the effluent that was being discharged from the storm overflows at the Holt water recycling centre into the River Glaven. She felt that the written response from Anglian Water (AW) had still not clarified this. The Head of Quality Regulation and Enforcement (HQRE) replied that the water recycling centre at Holt discharged continuous final effluent to the watercourse. There was also a storm overflow there. These two separate discharges were permitted by the Environment Agency and each permit would specify the conditions set in order to ensure that the ecology of the receiving watercourse was not harmed. She said that AW did not have a requirement to monitor storm overflow discharges (as in sample them) as they were very low impact discharges, as long as they complied with the conditions of their permit. AW did however record and report the number of times that discharges were made. She added that the continuous final effluent discharge from the water treatment centre was the treated discharge that ran through the sewage treatment works. There was a requirement to test for certain parameters, as set out in the permit, including suspended solids ammonia limits and biological oxygen demand as these could impact on the ecology of the receiving watercourse river. She said that she could provide a full set of permit parameters for Holt and the results of the samples taken over the last 12 months. The Regional Engagement Manager (REM) added that the storm overflows were designed to operate in storm conditions, so the predominant content was rainwater and it was going into watercourses that were already diluted. He said that AW was confident that the impact was minimal. If a discharge happened outside of storm

conditions then this would be fully investigated.

- b) Cllr M Hankins referred to AW's commitment to invest £200m into reducing the activation of storm overflows. He asked if the target of 2030 was correct and was concerned that this was a long way off and wondered if there was an ongoing programme in place to address this. The HQRE replied that there was a programme of works in place and this ran on a 5 year cycle and AW worked with Offwat and the Environment Agency (EA) on this basis to plan and deliver their programme of work. The current programme ended in 2025 and then the next one in 2030, so although references were made to projects being delivered by 2030 this did not mean that they would be delivered in that last year, they would occur throughout the 5 year period as part of an incremental programme. There were currently 165 schemes that were being delivered between 2020 and 2025 and these included increasing the amount of flow kept in the system and passed forward to water recycling centres for treatment and also the retention of storm water in storm retention tanks, to reduce discharges into water courses. To date, 115 of the 165 schemes in the current programme had been delivered. She said that during the next 5 year period further storm overflow improvements would be delivered but they would be staggered between 2025 and 2030.

In response to a further question from Cllr Hankins as to whether the programme of works was available to the public, the REM confirmed that the 5 year plans were published on AW's website. The Chairman commented that the proposals to retain and store more surface water would certainly help manage overflows more effectively in the future. The fresh water could also be stored for other uses.

- c) Cllr W Fredericks referred to an overflow at the pumping station in Mundesley on 19th March 2023 (Mother's Day). She said that although the water was testing clear after two days the surrounding land, including the concrete apron on the seafront and the land adjacent to the pumping station, was not. She asked if any lessons had been learned from this. The REM replied that this had been a very unfortunate incident due to a cracked sewer pipe and he acknowledged that AW had let people down on that occasion. He said that lessons had been learnt and an internal review had been undertaken. There had been some discussions as to whether to let nature take its course and allow the surrounding environment to become clean without intervention but a decision was taken to clean some of the surfaces and replace some shingle at Mundesley. Cllr Fredericks replied that she hoped an action plan would be provided to the engineers attending such scenes in the future. She then spoke about the loss of the blue flag at Mundesley which had been lost during a period of drought and was not due to storm surges. However, recent testing of the water showed that contamination was down to bird fouling and the local community questioned this. The REM replied that blue flags were not part of the remit of AW, they fell under the EA, although he acknowledged that AW was a factor. The bird fouling issue had been picked up at Heacham and was factually correct as it was identified as part of an analysis there. He added that the blue flag process was part of a four year rolling programme and water status

would need to be excellent for a considerable time to ensure that it was retained or awarded. He said that AW was investing £2m to reduce discharge rates at Mundesley so it was hoped that by 2027, the blue flag would be re-awarded, adding that there were several factors that could influence the outcome.

The HQRE added that AW was driven by science and would always carry out an investigation to understand the root cause of issues. There were various factors that could impact on bathing waters. She said that AW were learning all the time and they had an excellent coastal team undertaking work on this.

- d) Cllr H Blathwayt referred to the comments regarding sea water quality. He said that there had not been a noticeable increase in bird life and said that EA testing had found a certain level of other animal pollutants too, including chicken DNA, which presumably had passed through humans first. He therefore believed that the majority of pollution in the sea was caused by humans. Cllr Blathwayt then referred to recent flooding events which had over-topped river banks and affected sewage drainage from low-lying communities in the east of the District. He asked if AW was confident that it could cope with the sewage and the amount of river water flooding. In conclusion, he asked about Knacker's Wood water treatment centre to improve its efficiency and capabilities. The HQRE replied that it was interesting that chicken DNA was being found in the sea and she said that she would appreciate information relating to this being shared with AW and their coastal team could assess this. The REM said that regarding the flooding issues, storms were becoming more frequent and although AW's assets were performing as they should, they were overwhelmed by the frequency and amount of surface water flooding. He said that AW was investing in climate mitigation and gave the example of the relocation of sewage pipes at Lowestoft as they were due to be affected by coastal erosion. A multi-agency approach was the best way to tackle such challenges and was already proving effective. Regarding Knacker's Wood, he confirmed that AW planned to invest £2m in upgrading this facility in the next 5 years.
- e) Cllr J Toye asked whether AW's funding was focussed on delivering new projects or did it include planned upgrades too. He was particularly concerned that there had been very limited population growth, so the majority of events were linked to storms and flooding and this implied that there had not been much forward planning. He also asked whether their funding programme factored in the impact of plans and programmes from other stakeholders, such as NNDC's Local Plan. The REM replied that in terms of planning forwards, growth was a big factor and AW was a consultee for local plans. However, they were not currently statutory consultees for individual planning applications. There was funding allocated to growth in their 5 year programme and this was linked to forthcoming schemes across East Anglia. In response to the query regarding anticipating the impact of storms, the REM said that it was due to climate change and they would not anticipate the number and the impact of storms 5-10 years ago. The HQRE added that the funding was not focussed on

maintaining the current system and assets, it was about enhancing them and driving down the number of spills.

The Chairman said that all agencies and stakeholders needed to bear responsibility for planning ahead and anticipating future events.

- f) Cllr N Housden said that he understood that AW had under-reported spills into rivers and had 11 of the worst sewage incidents in the country. He said that given the level of spills, he was particularly concerned about the River Wensum and sought assurance that there would be substantial investment to protect the major chalk streams. In conclusion, he asked how he could have confidence in what AW was saying, given that they were still awaiting Ofwat approval for their funding programme for the next 5 years. The HQRE replied that AW had two ways to report data to the EA and on the website. For storm overflow spill reporting, there had been 100% compliance. She said that Cllr Housden may be referring to the self reporting of pollutions. This was a different method and occurred when AW reported an incident to the EA. If a member of the public reported an incident, it was not logged as a self-reported incident. The EA measured AW on how many incidents were self-reported. To ensure all incidents were reported, AW encouraged the public to report them to AW as soon as possible. She acknowledged that AW had not done as well as hoped in 2022 and data science was being put in place to ensure that there was enhanced visibility of the sewer networks. In addition, 22k monitors were being installed across the region to obtain more information about what was occurring in their catchments. This would enable AW to get to incidents quickly and self-report. The REM added that AW's future programme had to be published a year in advance and Ofwat would assess it. He said that £9bn was the largest investment proposal to date but it would be weighed against the cost of water bills and Ofwat would decide if it was a fair and balanced plan. Cllr Housden asked if there was a cap on the amount that AW could invest. The REM replied that there was not, Ofwat would decide if AW could deliver that amount of money, which came from shareholders.
- g) Cllr R Macdonald asked about the schedule for the improvement of water treatment in his ward of Gimingham. The REM replied that there had been two overflow discharges in 2022 on that site and although there were no concerns and it seemed to be working as it should, the pumping station would be monitored.
- h) Cllr P Heinrich referred to North Walsham, which was a major growth area. He sought assurance from AW that there were plans in place to upgrade the sewage works and the water supply as confidence amongst local residents was low. The HQRE replied that AW would work with the Council's growth team to see where growth was planned and the impact on serving the particular area. There was a drainage water management plan in place which looked at growth up to 30 years ahead. AW assessed the load on the network and the flow and whether the network was capable of supporting this. AW approached the EA and informed them that the flow to a particular area was going to increase and the EA would assess the impact on the flow into

watercourses and review the standard and conditions of the permit. This would then drive any investment in the site.

The Chairman thanked everyone for their contributions. He asked members for input regarding the timing of any future reviews of AW's progress. The REM offered to attend in June 2024 to ascertain members views on AW's plan. Cllr Housden supported this suggestion. The Chairman said that it would need to be accommodated within the committee's work programme, so it would be considered nearer the time. He suggested that the next monitoring report should be in a year's time.

It was proposed by Cllr N Housden, seconded by Cllr P Fisher and

RESOLVED

1. To note the progress being made
2. To request a further update in 12-18 months' time

80 BUDGET MONITORING P6 2023 - 2024

The Chairman invited Cllr L Shires, Portfolio Holder for Finance & Assets, to introduce this item. She began by saying that the report that would be presented to Full Council would be updated to reflect the recent staff pay award. She then outlined each of the recommendations in turn and directed members to the relevant sections of the report, which set out the supporting detail for each one. Cllr Shires then spoke about page 37, section 2.8 of the report, which detailed the increasing cost pressure of providing temporary accommodation to homeless households. She asked Cllr W Fredericks, Portfolio Holder for Housing to elaborate on this.

Cllr Fredericks said that she had recently been asked to speak at a National Temporary Accommodation Summit, along with four other councils, presenting to 110 councils. The aim was to ask to Government for more financial support to deal with the issue of homelessness. She said that the main reasons for the increase in homelessness were domestic abuse and private lets coming to an end – often because the properties were being sold or because they were being turned into holiday lets. The original budget was between £600-700k a year and it was likely to be £1.2m in the next financial year, which was a huge increase. Many families were placed in bed and breakfast establishments, usually out of District and away from family, work and school. She said that this was a nationwide problem and all councils were asking for financial support from Government. She said that the Council was doing everything it could but was running out of feasible solutions.

Cllr L Shires concluded by referring members to page 39, section 3.7 of the report. This set out the current position with retained business rates.

The Director for Finance & Resources (DFR) advised the Committee that officers were taking measures to review budgets and make savings. The savings that had already been achieved on staffing would be taken forward.

The Chairman invited members to speak:

- a) Cllr C Cushing referred to the amount of money that the Council was spending on borrowing, approximately £300k. He said he had raised this as a concern previously and had asked how this could be avoided in the future and he

wondered if there were any other examples of when access to available cash may be needed at short notice. The DFR replied the Council was required to hold a certain level of liquid assets in terms of cash and everything else was tied up in investments. The amount lost in payments on interest on borrowing had been off-set by the amount not taken from investments. She added that she was closely monitoring any borrowing to ensure that it was managed very carefully and only done for short periods of time. Cllr Cushing followed up by asking if there was a facility for Councils to access funds on a short-term basis without losing too much interest. The DFR replied that the Council had access to money market funds but these did not have the level of interest that other investment funds achieved.

- b) Cllr Dr V Holliday commented on the underspend on staffing in some areas. She asked whether this had an impact on productivity and output. She then asked about the reduction in the Delivery Plan reserve and queried whether this should be addressed as it could potentially impact on the delivery of the Corporate Plan objectives. The DFA replied that regarding staff vacancies, it was often where officers had either not had the time to recruit or not been successful in recruiting. It did impact on teams and the service they were able to provide and was an issue across the Council. The DFA said that the projected level for this reserve was expected to be £1.8m as at the end of this financial year. This figure reflected planned spending from this reserve. She added that at this point in time, there were no plans to top up this reserve. Cllr Holliday asked if this was potentially a risk to the organisation if the reserve was gradually depleted with no plans to replenish it and the corporate plan objectives could not be achieved due to reduced funding. Cllr Shires agreed that this could potentially be an issue and said that the situation would be reviewed annually. The Chief Executive added that currently the Council was in a sound financial position and this reserve had been built up over many years. He acknowledged that the context within which local authorities were operating in was changing significantly and the Council's core spending power had reduced significantly and the flexibility moving forward was likely to be more constrained. He concluded by saying that over time the ambitions to deliver against the Corporate Plan may be diminished, particularly as the Council faced the challenge of rising temporary accommodation costs.
- c) Cllr N Housden referred to revised staffing costs and sought more information. The DFA replied that the staff pay award had been announced following the Cabinet meeting on 6th November and there was not enough time to update the report. She said that the overall impact would be £120k over what was budgeted for. This was due to the flat rate of £1925 per employee. Cllr Housden then referred to the recent supreme court ruling regarding the Rwanda scheme. He asked whether this could potentially result in additional demands on the Council regarding housing costs as more migrants may need to be housed in the area. The Chief Executive replied that there were no Government commissioned hotels for asylum seekers in North Norfolk and the housing pressures and associated temporary accommodation costs in the District were almost exclusively related to local people. He added that the Council was having to place people in temporary accommodation out of the district due to the numbers requiring support. This was an issue across the country but particularly in Essex and Hertfordshire, where costs were considerably higher than elsewhere. This was why the District Council Network had recently convened an emergency meeting to agree an approach to dealing with this

issue. He went onto say that as the Government reduced the number of asylum seekers placed in hotels and tried to process asylum claims in an expedient manner, it was possible that there could be additional pressures on accommodation and the duty and associated costs as it would no longer fall to the Government to fund this but to local authorities.

- d) The Chairman thanked the Chief Executive for his explanation and said that the displacement from areas subject to such pressures could ultimately then place pressure on rural authorities such as North Norfolk as people began to disperse and seek alternative areas to live in. The Chief Executive agreed, saying that there were proposals for quotas that would be allocated nationwide, however, many asylum seekers wanted to be placed in cities rather than rural areas and to date, this meant that North Norfolk had not seen a high number of asylum seekers wanting to settle in the area.
- e) Cllr M Hankins asked about council tax collection for mixed-use caravan parks. He said that many people who had purchased residential properties on these sites had opted not to register to vote and therefore were not liable to pay council tax. He asked what was the protocol for addressing this issue. The Revenues Manager replied that the Valuation Office (VO) rated caravan sites and they classified whether it was for business use or domestic use. The Council would then bill based on the valuation. If it was believed that it was in the wrong category and someone was residing there full time, then the Council would report it to the VO and they would re-categorise it.
- f) Cllr W Fredericks thanked the Chief Executive for explaining the national situation regarding the pressures placed on local authorities regarding temporary accommodation costs. She said that in cities, many Council Leaders were reporting that the Home Office was outbidding local authorities on bed and breakfast places.
- g) Cllr J Boyle asked about long-term empty homes and requested an update on how the council was progressing with tackling this problem and bringing more back into use to alleviate pressure on the Council's finances. Cllr W Fredericks replied that the Council's Empty Homes Officer was working extremely hard and between April and October 2023, 92 empty homes had been brought back into use. This provided much needed accommodation and also enabled council tax payments to the Council.

It was proposed by Cllr P Fisher, seconded by Cllr M Hankins and

RESOLVED

That Overview & Scrutiny Committee supports the Cabinet decision to

- 1) Note the contents of the report and the current budget monitoring position and note that officers will work together to take action to reduce the overall projected deficit on the General Fund at the year-end of 2023/24.

And supports the following Cabinet recommendations to Full Council that it approves:

- 2) An additional capital budget of £58k so that the work for the refurbishment of the Red Lion roof (Cromer), the Art Deco Block roof and handrails (Cromer) and the Chalet Block at Sheringham can be awarded as one contract. And that approval be given to fund the additional expenditure from the Asset

Management Reserve.

- 3) An increase to the DFG capital budget of £118k and approves that it is funded by the additional grant received for this purpose from the Government.
- 4) The provision of a new play area at the Lees in Sheringham and approves a capital project budget for this of £65k and that funding for this should come from the Delivery Plan Reserve.
- 5) The capital spending of £11k on the Morris Street Car Park Boundary Wall and that it be funded from the Asset Management Reserve.
- 6) That the £85k of the Car Park refurbishment capital budget is reallocated to the Public Conveniences so that the outstanding works can be carried out and complete the scheme.

81 TREASURY MANAGEMENT MID-YEAR REPORT 2023-2024

The Chairman invited the DFA to introduce this item. She said that the report set out the treasury management activities undertaken during the first half of the 2023/2024 financial year compared with the treasury management strategy for the year. It included an economic forecast and a forecast of interest rates.

It was proposed by Cll G Bull, seconded by J Boyle and

RESOLVED

To support the Cabinet recommendation to Full Council to approve the Treasury Management Mid-Year Report 2023-2024

82 COUNCIL TAX DISCOUNTS & PREMIUMS DETERMINATION 2024-2025

Cllr L Shires, Portfolio Holder for Finance & Assets, introduced this item. She drew members' attention to recommendation 5, which related to care leavers and the cost of which was fully compensated by Norfolk County Council and recommendation 9, which set out the intention to introduce a second homes premium of 100% from 1 April 2025. The Revenues Manager referred to Recommendation 8 which allowed the long-term empty property premium of 100% to be brought forward to increase from 12 months rather than 24 months from 1 April 2024. He said that this would bring in additional income to the Council of approximately £68K and he added that it did seem to be encouraging people to bring empty homes back into use.

The Chairman invited members to speak :

- a) Cllr V Holliday referred to the second home premium and said that she thought that the income would have been higher than that forecast. She also asked if it would be ring-fenced as several of her constituents had sought assurances regarding this. The Chief Executive replied that there was an anticipated £550K return to NNDC as a share of the collected council tax, however, the overall figure that went to the County Council and the Police & Crime Commissioner was significantly higher. He said that it was the wish of the Leader and the Portfolio Holder for Finance & Assets to continue

to press for more money to be returned to NNDC and then ring-fenced for future social housing provision.

The Revenues Manager said that there were currently 4,764 second homes in North Norfolk and the gross charge for those properties currently was over £9.3m and this could potentially be doubled once the charge came into effect. However, he cautioned that the details of the Levelling Up Bill had not been shared yet and more accurate estimates could be provided once this was the case.

It was proposed by Cllr J Boyle, seconded by Cllr R Macdonald and

RESOLVED to support the following recommendations to Full Council:

That under Section 11A of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 and in accordance with the provisions of the Local Government Finance Act 2012 and other enabling powers that:

1. The discounts for the year 2024-25 and beyond are set at the levels indicated in the table at paragraph 3.1.
2. To continue to award a local discount of 100% in 2024-25 for eligible cases of hardship under Section 13A of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 (as amended). See the associated policy in Appendix B.
3. That an exception to the levy charges may continue to be made by the Revenues Manager in the circumstances laid out in section 3.2 of this report.
4. The premiums for the year 2024-25 and beyond are set at the levels indicated in the table at paragraph 4.2.
5. To continue to award a local discount of 100% in 2024-25 for eligible cases of care leavers under Section 13A of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 (as amended).
6. Those dwellings that are specifically identified under regulation 6 of the Council Tax (Prescribed Classes of Dwellings) (England) Regulations 2003 will retain the 50% discount as set out in paragraph 2.1 of this report.
7. Those dwellings described or geographically defined at Appendix A which in the reasonable opinion of the Revenues Manager are judged not to be structurally capable of occupation all year round and were built before the restrictions of seasonal usage were introduced by the Town and Country Planning Act 1947, will be entitled to a 35% discount.
8. The long-term empty-property premium of 100% is brought forward to increase from 12 months rather than 24 months from 1 April 2024.
9. A new second homes premium of 100% as detailed in paragraph 4.3 is applied from 1 April 2025

The Chairman invited Cllr H Blathwayt, Portfolio Holder for the Coast, to introduce this item. Cllr Blathwayt said that there had been a Member Briefing on the new Coastwise scheme and the slides and recording link had been circulated to all members. He went on to say that the Coastwise project was a fantastic example of where North Norfolk was leading and others would be following. He added that the recent LGA Peer Review had praised it as 'work of national importance'.

The Chairman invited members to speak :

- a) Cllr P Fisher referred to recent storms and asked whether the sandscaping scheme was still holding up as expected. Cllr Blathwayt replied that regular surveys were being undertaken. It didn't sit within the remit of Coastwise but the sandscaping scheme was still holding up well and was operating as anticipated. He added that the sandscaping scheme just bought more time and Coastwise was focussed on how to use that time to prepare for the future. The Coastal Transition Manager (CTM) confirmed that there was ongoing monitoring for the sandscaping scheme which was undertaken by shared Coastal Partnership East (CPE) team in conjunction with Bacton Gas Terminal. He said that it was functioning well and although there were fluctuations, he believed that if the scheme had not been implemented there would have been many more flooding events. He agreed that it had bought time but said that Coastwise's aim was to ensure that the most was achieved from this additional time. There were difficult challenges ahead but he was hopeful that Coastwise would support local communities to adapt and move forward in a positive way.
- b) Cllr V Holliday commented on the risk register and asked whether it would go to Governance, Risk & Audit Committee (GRAC) for assessment. The Chief Executive replied that the corporate risk register went to GRAC on a quarterly basis but if members wanted to refer the Coastwise risk register to GRAC then that was an option. It was a large scheme with a considerable amount of funding (£15m). The Chairman of GRAC, Cllr J Toye, said that the committee could consider the risk register at the next meeting and decide if it was something that should be included in their work programme on an ongoing basis.
- c) Cllr N Housden asked whether, under the Coastwise Scheme, the risks to NNDC coastal assets had been considered. The CTM replied that Coastwise was focussing on areas of the coast where there was erosion and not on the 'hold the line' areas. He said that the Council did own assets such as car parks in some of these areas and discussions would take place with local communities. Cllr Housden asked whether such issues that arose during each stage of the scheme could be reported to Overview & Scrutiny Committee. The CTM confirmed that this could be done if members requested it. He added that there was a new Coastal Erosion Risk Mapping project that was underway and the outcomes from this would be launched publicly in the summer of 2024. This new mapping would also take forward two different climate scenarios and this information would be analysed closely to help understand the impact on assets.
- d) The Chairman said that it would be helpful to have more insight into the risk register and how the scores had been reached and he asked if this could be carried forward to GRAC. Cllr J Toye said that GRAC would consider the

report and the risk scores and also assess how it sat corporately, particularly regarding the risk to the Council's assets. The CTM added that the risk log that was included in the Overview & Scrutiny agenda was an edited version of a much more extensive risk register. He said that there was an internal project governance board in place which had reviewed the risk register and the EA Large Project Review Group had also considered the initial risk register and added some additional risks. The Coastwise Board had also had a risk workshop to aid their understanding of the issues. He said that he welcomed GRAC considering the matter further.

It was proposed by Cllr R Macdonald, seconded by Cllr P Fisher and

RESOLVED to

1. To endorse the delivery of Coastwise
2. To request that Governance, Risk & Audit Committee reviews the risks presented by the Coastwise Project in respect of the likelihood and impact elements of the risk scores (pre and post the mitigation actions) so that there is clarity about how those actions will work and thus provide greater reassurance that they are being managed effectively and who owns them.

84 THE CABINET WORK PROGRAMME

The Democratic Services Manager (DSM) updated members on the Cabinet work programme and advised them that it was relatively light for December. This was due to the majority of financial reports coming through to Overview & Scrutiny Committee for pre-scrutiny first in December and then onto Cabinet in January.

85 OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME AND UPDATE

The DSM said that the work programme for the committee was heavy in December due to the number of financial reports coming through for pre-scrutiny. There had been a request to consider the Local Economic Strategy & Action Plan in December but it may be best to push this back to January to allow for a full discussion of this item. She concluded by saying that the previous Scrutiny Officer had contacted NHS Norfolk & Waveney ICB regarding various questions that had been raised at the last meeting of the committee. A response to those questions had recently been received and the DSM would circulate that information to all members after the meeting.

Cllr J Boyle, the Committee's representative on the Norfolk Health Overview & Scrutiny Committee (NHOSC) said that she had been tasked with putting two questions to NHOSC and she had the responses to share with members. She said that there was also a request from NHOSC to make a recommendation that the Leader of the Council writes to the Cabinet Member for Public Health in support of school dentistry, as this was a significant gap in dentistry provision for children. The Chairman suggested that Cllr Boyle shared the written responses with the DSM and she would circulate them with the NHS responses.

86 EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

The meeting ended at 12.30 pm.

Chairman