

County Councillors Report September 2023

Devolution Deal for Norfolk:

Members of the Council will be receiving several briefings (via Teams) over the coming weeks on the proposed devolution deal between the government and Norfolk County Council. This is in anticipation of the passing of the required legislation to legalise the proposed governance arrangements, including a directly elected leader and the vote in Council in December to either reject or adopt the deal. If the deal is accepted in December elections for a new directly elected leader will be held in May 2024. The new leader will have a term of office of 5 years initially reverting to a 4-year term at the 2029 County Council elections. Should members reject the deal Norfolk will lose government money amounting to £600m over the next 30 years, i.e. £20m per year. In Norfolk district borough and the city councils are not included in the deal and will not benefit from any extra money. Some district councils have expressed opposition to the deal as they will not have any say on NCC affairs that could directly affect their areas and that some of their responsibilities would be "grabbed" by the new governance arrangements.

While I appreciate that information in the public domain on is not very detailed, I would appreciate the views of your parish council on the proposed deal. Particularly with respect to the change in governance to a directly elected leader. This will guide my thoughts on the vote to be taken on the deal at a meeting of the full council in December.

Budget for 2024-25:

The discussion on the budget for 2024/25 has been in train since February. The council has identified a budget gap of £46m to be filled. Transformation project (changing the way we work) are expected to provide up to £10m of those savings. NCC are working on the assumption that council tax must rise by the maximum allowed, 4.99%. A reduction of 1% in the anticipated rise would require an extra £4.9m of savings to be identified. Upward pressure from both adult and children's social care expenditure and the failure of the government to implement the promised fairer funding review are the cause of the budget gap.

Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC) in Schools:

The issue in relation Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC) in schools was first raised in 2018. This is where a particular construction built between the late 1950s and 1980 which used a type of lightweight concrete plank has been found to have failed in some instances. RAAC was mostly in roofs but also occasionally walls and has meant complete roof collapse in some schools (elsewhere in the Country) and some hospitals. The DFE has engaged all local authority areas in investigating and managing this issue. Working with the NCC Health and Safety Manager, Children's Services commissioned NPS to undertake an assessment of the schools' estate for which NCC is the Responsible Body. This does not include academy or Voluntary Aided (church) schools.

The process set out by the DFE RAAC Guidance is firstly a desktop risk assessment based on the age of the buildings, and then any information about the construction of buildings. Where these were in any way inconclusive, a visual inspection by a qualified surveyor took place. There were 83 buildings on around 75 schools where this was required. Following that, any of these where there was remaining uncertainty, intrusive surveys were commissioned and completed. These numbered 28 inspections on 25 different sites. The conclusion from this exercise was that none of the maintained schools in the Norfolk County Council area contained RAAC.

However, Academy Schools are independent institutions, responsible for their own property portfolios, although NCC is the landlord in many instances. The DFE process and guidance established the expectation that academies conduct surveys of their sites and report the outcome to the DFE.

NCC is not accountable for this process, but we have contacted all academy trusts in Norfolk 3 times since 2019 in order to highlight the issue, guidance and process and to offer any support they might need. Two times it was to recommend surveys were undertaken to assess for RAAC and finally in June 2023 to highlight the latest guidance and also recommend they complete the DFE RAAC survey. Up to the end of August no academies had contacted NCC to highlight any concerns or to report any presence of RAAC. It has now (1st September) come to light that one academy (Thomas Bullock Primary) has been found to have confirmed RAAC in the hall. This will require a day's delay for the start of term but nothing more at present. This school is part of the DNEAT multi-academy Trust as part of the Norwich Diocese.

The liaison between the DFE and academies to complete any outstanding follow-up surveys is ongoing. An additional email has now been sent from the

director of Childrens Services to all Academy Trusts as of 1 September 2023 to further highlight the process and guidance.

DIY Waste:

On the 18 June Government set out its plans on how DIY waste at recycling centres is going to be addressed via *'changes that will be brought in to force this year'*

Further clarity from Government is awaited on the implementation, detail and timing of its proposal, **which importantly is not a ban on charging** but is instead a limit on what should be accepted for free from householders. The County Council has been charging for DIY waste at recycling centres for over 20 years and in 2018 removed a weekly free allowance of one 80 litre bag or one item a week from householders. As it stands the new Government proposal is likely to specify that, in relation to small-scale projects undertaken by householders, there would be:

- *'free disposal of DIY waste up to two 50L rubble bags (or one bulky or fitted item no larger than 2,000mm by 750mm by 700mm, the approximate size of a bathtub or shower screen)'*
- *'at a frequency of 4 visits per household over a 4-week period'*

Government has clarified that new funding will not be provided to councils to deal with the extra costs of this change to legislation, with DLUHC deciding *'that local authorities that currently charge householders to dispose of DIY waste will be required to absorb any associated costs'*. Consequently, if the changes to legislation go ahead as planned then the County Council would face a new unfunded burden of around £0.5m to £1m a year – depending on the detail of the new requirements and how customers respond to any required change.

Furthermore, it is not a policy change that is expected to have a notably significant effect on fly-tipping incident numbers, a view that is informed by the findings of a national investigation by waste charity Wrap on charging and fly-tipping, which established *'no evidence of an association between fly-tipping and charging at HWRCs'*. The next steps are expected to be changes to the Controlled Waste (England and Wales) Regulations 2012 made this autumn, with the possibility of implementation start date of early 2024.

Mark Kiddle-Morris, Norfolk County Council,
Member for Necton & Launditch.
3rd September, 2023.