



Council

12 March 2024

Questions to cabinet members

Question 1

Councillor Carrington to ask the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety the following question:

“It has now been two years since the illegal invasion, by Russia, of Ukraine. This city council has, in keeping with its tradition of welcoming people to Norwich, assisted hundreds of people fleeing the conflict during this time. Can the cabinet member comment on what has been delivered so far?”

Councillor Jones, the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety's response:

“Since March 2022, our community support team has been working in collaboration with Norfolk County Council to deliver the Homes for Ukraine scheme in Norwich.

This scheme was stood up very quickly with our first guests arriving in April 2022, less than 6 weeks after the illegal invasion began. In total we have helped support over 246 guests (adults and children) through the scheme.

This has been with the help and generosity of over 135 hosts that have opened their homes to help accommodate. Whilst initially being asked to sponsor and host guests coming from Ukraine for a minimum of 6 months, many hosting arrangements are still in place nearly 2 years on. A number have also welcomed multiple guests, showing the repeated generosity and hospitality that is indicative of Norwich residents. In January we hosted a thank you event at City Hall and we were grateful for the time the Lord Mayor gave to welcome and personally thank so many of our hosts.

A significant amount of work goes into a scheme such as this one. Our team have completed almost 200 inspections to ensure the accommodation being offered by hosts is suitable, and they have made nearly 400 welfare visits to hosts and guests. Through these visits and ongoing dialogue, we have supported both hosts and guests with resolving a number of issues and concerns. This goes alongside strong partnership working with children's services to support the many mothers and their children who have fled the conflict.

We are still supporting 88 Ukrainian guests in hosted arrangements, and have supported many others into other accommodation at the end of their hosting arrangements. We continue to support guests after they have left hosting arrangements and the team are able to advise and signpost them to help answer their queries and questions.”

Question 2

Councillor Driver to ask the cabinet member for communities and social inclusion the following question:

“I was pleased that following a thorough audit of our play areas, the Budget allocated £1.1 million in Section 106 funding to provide new play area equipment for 28 play areas across the city over a three-year period. Could the Cabinet member please inform us which sites will benefit from new play equipment in the next 12 months?”

Councillor Giles, the cabinet member for communities and social inclusion's response:

“The following play facilities are due for improvement next year following completion of a full condition survey of all sites and inclusivity audit:

- Eaton Skate park
- Greenfields Skate park
- Heartsease Childrens' Playground (CPG)
- Heartsease Skate park
- Heigham Park CPG
- Jenny Lind CPG
- Stylman road CPG
- Waterloo Park CPG (Splash Pad)
- Wilberforce Road CPG.

This £500,000 of investment reflects the value this Labour-led council places on free play and recreation for children and young people in communities across Norwich, and the health and wellbeing benefits this brings.”

Question 3

Councillor Huntley to ask the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety the following question:

“In recent years this city has, like many, witnessed an increase in Far-Right activity which has sought to undermine and disrupt the community cohesion enjoyed in Norwich. Coupled to this I was horrified by the behaviour of the Conservative Party deputy chairman Lee Anderson MP who recently lost the whip due to his Islamophobic comments made against the Mayor of London. Can the cabinet member comment on what practical steps this council can take to protect, promote, and strengthen the common bonds and friendships between faiths to ensure Norwich always remains a safe and welcoming city for all?”

Councillor Jones, the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety's response:

“Thank you for highlighting this important issue, which Norwich, like many other parts of the country is facing.

Norwich City Council recognises the devastating impact that racially and religiously motivated hate crimes have on the city's people and communities. We are committed to proactively engaging with partner organisations and local community groups (including faith groups) to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation, whilst simultaneously working to promote good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not. Race and faith, of course, being two of the nine protected characteristics.

The council has recently agreed a new Equality, Diversity and Inclusion strategy. This strategy provides a renewed opportunity to celebrate the positive contributions that people from different backgrounds make, and actively seeks to promote tolerance, tackle inequalities and foster good relationships across our communities.

In addition, Norwich City Council benefits from several existing relationships with faith groups across the city, including those from Christian, Muslim, Jewish and Sikh communities. Through these, it supports faith groups to connect with others in the neighbourhoods and communities they serve.

Norwich is fortunate to have a strong and healthy understanding between faiths, demonstrated through a willingness to work together. One example is the relationship between Norwich Central Mosque and St. Luke's on Aylsham Road, who work together for the good of their shared community.

Over the past year, the council has worked hard to promote a sense of welcome and belonging for people sharing various faiths. In November last year, the Festive Light Switch On included contributions from local faith groups representing Muslim, Jewish, Hindu and Christian communities. This was followed by the placement of a big screen on City Hall wishing 'Peace and goodwill to all' in seven languages including Hebrew and Arabic. Additionally, Hanukah was celebrated at City Hall for the first time which

included a short ceremony where the menorah candle was lit. The council is working on an initiative to mark a wider range of religious and community festivals going forward.”

Question 4

Councillor Sue Sands to ask the cabinet member for communities and social inclusion the following question:

“Enhancing the quality of life for residents across the city will always remain a key city council priority. Building on the work of NCSL, I have been impressed by the ongoing and strengthening relationship with the local probation service through their Community Payback scheme. This has seen additional improvements being delivered, but also important rehabilitation work achieved too. Can the cabinet member comment on what has been delivered so far by this partnership?”

Councillor Giles, the cabinet member for communities and social inclusion's response:

“We’re proud to have built such a brilliant working relationship with the Probation Service’s Community Payback team, enhancing our communities, while providing critical rehabilitation and training objectives. To date we have worked with them on 41 referred projects, involving 215 persons on probation who have provided 160 hours of service. This has generated 92 tonnes of general waste and 130 tonnes of green waste - which is the equivalent weight of approximately 17 fire engines. Examples of some this fantastic work includes: clearance of land to provide spaces for a community garden; fence painting; garden tidying and clearances; remedial repair work to garden and street scene furniture; hard standing clearances and weed removal, shrub and hedge tidying; and litter and detritus removal. This is collaborative work we look forward to continuing in partnership between the Council, Probation Service, and NCSL.”

Question 5

Councillor Vaughan Thomas to ask the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety the following question:

“Since our last usual council meeting in January, I was particularly pleased that a planning application to develop the former Mile Cross depot site will be lodged before May. Building new council housing on this site and creating a new community will be another lasting testament to the political willpower of this Labour led administration to always deliver housing choice for Norwich people. Can the cabinet member comment on what will be contained in the application and the difference this will make if passed?”

Councillor Jones, the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety's response:

“The planning application for the redevelopment of the former Mile Cross depot site was validated by our planning department on 7 February 2024. It is for the first phase of the transformation of this disused brownfield site into a new community. If approved and built, it will deliver 67 much needed new high quality council homes, but it will also deliver the infrastructure to unlock the rest of the depot site, which is allocated for residential led mixed use development expected to accommodate 170 homes in total in the GNLP being considered for adoption by Council later today.

I hope this will make a real positive difference to Mile Cross and the connection of it to the city via fantastic links such as Marriotts Way when they consider it in due course.”

Question 6

Councillor Vivien Thomas to ask the cabinet member for regulatory services the following question:

“Recently, I assisted a resident who had complained of being food poisoned following a visit to a local eating establishment. After contacting the city council this was vigorously pursued and action against the proprietor pursued successfully. Following recent successful prosecutions against establishments selling out of date food, can the cabinet comment on the work this council undertakes to ensure establishments in this city remain safe for residents to visit and purchase items from?”

Councillor Fulton-McAlister, the cabinet member for regulatory services' response:

“The food and safety team follows the national program of inspecting all food businesses based on their risk profile. All food businesses are inspected: from home cake bakers; multisite restaurants and takeaways; and food factories. Higher risk food businesses are visited at least every 6 months, and the team are on track to complete inspections of all the high risk businesses by the end of the financial year.

The team supports businesses by offering direct advice and runs frequent training courses to help food business operators comply with the law.

All food complaints including both food poisoning complaints and food hygiene complaints, come into the team, are triaged and action taken according to the risk. Actions may include a visit, advice and potentially, formal action. Formal action is balanced with that of advice in accordance with the Council's corporate enforcement policy.

Recently, meat from two businesses was seized and cases taken before the Magistrates' court. An absence of suitable labels meant the businesses were unable to show where the meat had come from. Such interventions by the Food and safety team are essential in helping prevent the trade in stolen livestock and the placing of illegally slaughtered meat onto the market. This food has now been destroyed.

The Food and safety team also works in partnership with the Food Standards Agency in delivering the National Food Hygiene Rating Scheme. Most food businesses selling food to the public receive a food hygiene rating from zero (very poor) to five (very good). A rating of three is considered generally satisfactory. Approximately 96% of the rated food businesses in Norwich achieve at least this standard but nearly 50% of businesses achieve the top rating of five.”

Question 7

Councillor Maguire to ask the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety the following question:

“With an ever-reducing amount of council housing, due to the impact of the Tory enhanced right to buy, many residents now rent privately in my ward. Over the years I have met an increasing number of constituents who have benefitted from the city council LetNCC scheme whereby private landlords pass their properties to us and we ensure a tenant provided with a home. Can the cabinet comment on the success of this scheme in terms of the numbers of properties used and tenants provided a home who otherwise might have been left in temporary accommodation?”

Councillor Jones, the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety's response:

“The LET NCC scheme currently leases over 300 properties from private landlords to provide much needed accommodation to households threatened with homelessness who are working with the Council’s housing options team. Since April 2023 63 households have been offered and accepted a tenancy within the scheme which has resulted in these households no longer needing housing assistance.

The scheme currently has an advert in the Spring Citizen magazine recruiting new landlords to bring their properties to the scheme which is already generating a good deal of interest”

Question 8

Councillor Padda to ask the cabinet member for communities and social inclusion the following question:

“I have been impressed with the successes of the Love Norwich campaign run by the city council across communities in Norwich. Many of the interventions have been largescale and presumably involved significant resources. From talking to constituents, I believe there is a need for smaller and perhaps more flexible interventions which are more community led but could deliver practical and positive changes. Can the cabinet member comment on whether he believes the new Love Norwich community grants scheme will deliver this?”

Councillor Giles, the cabinet member for communities and social inclusion's response:

“Smaller, community led interventions often have a sustained impact on a neighbourhood, enabling residents to take local action themselves alongside fulfilling the wider duties the council delivers.

I am therefore extremely pleased that we have been able to establish the Love Norwich community grants to do just this.

The scheme has been integrated to link in with the existing support our community enabling team provide, to make processes as easy as possible for residents.

To date we have received 21 applications, have made 5 awards, are in the process of assessing a further 6 and are supporting the remaining 10 to develop their ideas ahead of assessing the applications.

The grant scheme has been created to encourage and support residents and community groups to take grassroots community action to improve their neighbourhood. It is designed to eliminate barriers to participation through a simplified application process and timely assessment, whilst the integration with the community enabling team means we can ensure the appropriate other support is in place, such as whether any permissions or insurances are required, whether they would benefit from being put in touch with others doing similar initiatives, or whether it would help to borrow some equipment.

This flexible approach is enabling residents to design and deliver practical changes to spaces that are important to them; from designing out problems, to improving already loved community spaces.

We are excited about the positive impact this grant scheme will have on multiple neighbourhoods and communities. Community led action, supported by a Love Norwich grant, enables meaningful ground up change that transforms spaces and builds stronger communities with increased connection, improved wellbeing and greater pride and ownership of where they live.”

Question 9

Councillor Peek to ask the cabinet member for resources the following question:

“Last year this council, like all in England, witnessed the first impact of Voter ID and the consequent damage this caused to thousands of people for whom voting became more difficult, cumbersome and in some cases proved impossible. Approaching the second anniversary of this and with the heightened risk of an approaching General Election and potentially many more people being negatively impacted, can the cabinet member comment on the steps this council has taken to limit the impact of the regressive and unfortunate national policy?”

Councillor Kendrick, the cabinet member for resources' response:

“The Government introduced the requirement for all electors to show photographic ID in December 2022. This made the local elections on 4 May 2023 the first year where electors had to provide photographic ID to vote. The Electoral Commission ran a national campaign to raise awareness which included adverts on TV, radio, billboards, buses, on social media and website banners and in local newspapers across England and we have been assured will be promoting it nationally again this year.

In addition to this, Norwich City Council is producing a comprehensive communications plan to further ensure that residents are aware of the requirements to bring photographic ID to vote at polling stations. All existing electors that are currently set up to vote in polling stations have been written to with full details of what forms of photographic ID are acceptable in polling stations. They have also been given the appropriate information to enable them set up a postal vote or alternative ID if required. All individuals added to the electoral register are informed of the new requirements.”

Question 10

Councillor Prinsley to ask the cabinet member for climate change the following question:

“I was pleased to see that early public engagement on the council’s forthcoming Norwich Climate Action Plan has been launched, with a survey live on GetTalking Norwich and residents having had a chance to input in-person at Norwich Science Festival. Could the cabinet member comment on the importance of this strategy and consultation process?”

Councillor Hampton, the cabinet member for climate change's response:

“The Norwich Climate Action Plan is a crucial step towards our target of achieving a net zero city by 2045. The plan will set out what we need to do as a city to achieve our 2045 target, but also what’s needed to ensure the city remains resilient and prosperous as the climate continues to change.

We’re currently working with the Norwich Climate Commission to develop the plan, and hearing from the public at this early stage is a key part of the process. By engaging with people now, we can ensure that the Plan is informed by the diverse range of views across Norwich, and as such is rooted in the perspectives, concerns, and ideas of our residents.

Having a presence at the Norwich Science Festival was an important part of this engagement process, listening to our residents’ hopes and concerns for the future. It was inspiring to hear from Norwich’s young people who are passionate about the environment and our city, and a great opportunity to reassure them that Norwich City Council are taking the climate crisis seriously. Many people were impressed by the great work that we’ve undertaken as a Council, ranging from the solar panels and air source heat pump on City Hall to the multi-million pound retrofit projects that we’ve delivered, but they also shared our desire to be more ambitious for Norwich. The Norwich Climate Action Plan will set out how we can do that, and anyone wishing to feed into our early engagement can do so on Get Talking Norwich until the 25 March.”

Question 11

Councillor Mike Sands to ask the leader of the council the following question:

“Ensuring the city develops in a sustainable manner, working with partners, to deliver upon the goals to creating new homes, infrastructure and the associated benefit from coordinated growth remains a key planning and political priority for this administration. Can the cabinet member comment on whether the proposed Greater Norwich Local Plan will deliver our shared objectives?”

Councillor Stonard, the leader's response:

“I will say more when I introduce the item proposing the adoption of the local plan shortly, but doing so will play a major role in both delivering the objectives we share with our partners and our priorities for Norwich.

The GNLP strategy and site allocations will assist the delivery of new homes, including affordable homes. Over 45,000 new homes will be delivered in Greater Norwich from the start of the plan period in 2018 to 2038. The majority of these will be delivered in and around the city, with good access to our growing employment base and services. The plan will help the delivery of a wide variety of new jobs, including jobs in growth sectors such as agri-tech, life sciences, advanced engineering, and digital creative industries.

Having a local plan in place brings major benefits. It:

- Maximises the potential to deliver the affordable homes we so desperately need;
- De-risks the development of allocated sites, supports our long-term joint approach for strategically planned growth and greatly reduces the likelihood of speculative development on unallocated sites;
- And increases the likelihood of securing funding and support to help deliver high quality development.

So, adopting it will bring significant benefits, helping us to meet our housing and jobs needs, address climate change and deliver the infrastructure we need.”

Question 12

Councillor Haynes to ask the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety the following question:

“With a rampant housing crisis, we should be doing all we can to ensure that homes are not sat empty in our city, and that long-term empty properties are brought back into use to increase the demand of quality housing in the city. Last April, Councillor Beth Jones said that there is a plan in place to expand the service aimed at reducing the number of empty homes in the city. She said that the first step of this is the restructure that was underway at the time, but we have not had any answers about whether work has actually started on this. Can the cabinet member confirm whether or not the council has an Empty Homes Strategy and the resources to deal with this?”

Councillor Jones, the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety's response:

“The restructure of regulatory services was completed in April 2023 and the resultant recruitment has now been completed. There has been further investment in the service in order to allow improved digitisation of various records and regulatory process. This is changing and should not only improve services to our customers but will also increase efficiency of our operations allowing an increased proportion of officer time to be spent on tackling issues such as long-term empty properties.

Whilst these efficiencies are being delivered, we continue to work across the council and with property owners to address issues associated with empty homes where there is a detrimental impact on neighbours or the amenity of an area. It remains our intention to produce an empty homes strategy in due course.”

Question 13

Councillor Catt to ask the cabinet member for regulatory services the following question:

“Data from last year showed that 740 privately rented properties in Norwich had an EPC rating of either F or G, falling below the minimum legal standard for privately rented properties. It is the job of local authorities to enforce these rules and ensure the renters are not suffering in extremely cold and leaky homes, or having to pay excessive amounts on heating during a cost of living crisis. When I asked what enforcement action the council was taking on this, I was told the council does not collect data on this (despite data of this nature previously being sent to another councillor). What enforcement action is the council taking against these landlords?”

Councillor Fulton-McAlister, the cabinet member for regulatory services' response:

“Norwich City Council will always take robust action against unethical landlords where the law allows. We will not shy away from issuing the maximum penalties and will always prioritise tenants. Unfortunately, however, the law is not as strong as we would like.

The Housing Act 2004 gives Local Authorities the power to enforce minimum Housing Standards in the private rented sector using the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS). One key limitation of The Housing Act is that the EPC rating of a property cannot be considered in isolation, this often limits any legal action we could take against a landlord, it could however limit their power in the landlord/tenant relationship such as they may find it difficult to issue a section 21 eviction notice and enforce it within a court, while we will provide advice to tenants on these matters ultimately it is for them/their legal representatives/their tenant's unions to utilise but it could fall short of the legal threshold for us to take enforcement action. Even if a property meets an EPC rating of E, landlords will need to provide adequate heating and thermal comfort. Local Authorities can prosecute or issue penalties of up to £30,000 when hazards including excess cold are identified in a property and not rectified. As it stands, it is a requirement for privately rented properties to have an **Energy Performance Certificate (EPC)** rating of at least **E** before the tenancy is renewed or the house is rented out to a new tenant. The legislation prevents landlords from renting out a property with a rating of **F** or **G**. As of 1 April 2020, this applied to new and existing tenancies. We therefore expect to see a reduction year on year as existing tenancies come to an end.

As part of our service improvement plan for regulatory services, we are reviewing how we record data regarding conditions in the private rented housing stock and any actions we take to address this.

In the meantime, the council will continue to investigate cases of excess cold in the private rented stock that are reported to us and will take the appropriate action where necessary to address.”

Question 14

Councillor Worley to ask the cabinet member for resources the following question:

“One of the items for the 7 of February cabinet meeting, scrutiny committee papers, was made available to the public and councillors at 11.27am on the day of cabinet, just 6 hours ahead of the meeting. These were the recommendations of the scrutiny committee on two important issues: next year's budget, and a major programme of works for energy efficiency in the council's 14.5k council homes. Scrutiny is the council's main way of holding cabinet to account. The response from cabinet to one report was given only verbally. Since November, 10 out of 18 cabinet reports have been sent out well after the deadline agreed in our constitution. This lateness of key reports shows a council in disarray with a clear lack of leadership. What will be done to ensure reports are on time?”

Councillor Kendrick, the cabinet member for resources' response:

“The recommendations from the scrutiny committee were tabled at the cabinet meeting due to the scrutiny meeting being held at the end of the previous week. We appreciate this was not an ideal situation but unfortunately the timings of the meetings meant that this was the case. This was nothing to do with reports being late as seems to be suggested.

On the different matter of publishing reports. The council has a forward plan for all committees to ensure that reports are published on time, however in few instances there may be urgent items, unforeseen circumstances or technical report content reasons that cause a slight delay in publishing reports, but this is by exception. Officers work extremely hard on behalf of us as members to ensure we receive quality, comprehensive, thorough reports to enable informed decisions to be made on important matters – on few occasions, there may be a slight delay in order to make sure that none of these elements are compromised or to ensure we have the most up to date information possible.

In relation to your point about the Constitution, you will be aware that part 4 – codes and protocols access to information rules point 29 within our Constitution states that *‘If an item is added to the agenda later, the revised agenda will be open to inspection from the time the item was added to the agenda’*.

And point 30 of part 4 of the Constitution states *‘Where reports are prepared after the summons has been sent out, the designated officer shall make each such report available to the public as soon as the report is completed and sent to councillors.’*

This is all within the rules and procedures that our constitution sets out.”

Question 15

Councillor Young to ask the cabinet member for climate change the following question:

“Communal food waste bins need regular collection to remain sanitary, or they become smelly and a magnet for rodents. Despite residents and councillors reporting it, a large communal food waste bin was uncollected since December in Charles Square. Does the cabinet member commit to making sure that there is a working process to swiftly empty and clean communal waste bins, even if contaminated, as leaving them for months with a red tag on is a blight on communities?”

Councillor Hampton, the cabinet member for climate change's response:

“The food waste bins are emptied weekly and cleaned monthly in the winter and fortnightly in the summer. Contaminated bins will be referred back to Biffa to add to the contamination runs. If this has not been collected, then residents should report this through the council’s website to ensure swift collection.

I understand that the bin in Charles Square has recently been collected, however I have asked that our contractors add it to their next contamination run to ensure it is clean.”

Question 16

Councillor Francis to ask the cabinet member for climate change the following question:

“Recent figures from Defra show that Norwich City Council is 210th out of 342 local authorities on its recycling rate, following a year of stagnant recycling rates falling below target for four quarters in a row. Is the council reaching out to broadly comparable local authorities in the region such as Cambridge, Welwyn Hatfield, Colchester or St Albans to investigate best practice for how we can improve in Norwich?”

Councillor Hampton, the cabinet member for climate change's response:

“The council offers a class leading range of recycling services. Whilst the council’s recycling rates have not changed over the last few years, the amount of waste and recycling collected have reduced over the last 3 years. In this, we are similar to many councils nationally and locally, and the latest published national recycling rate for 2021 is the same as it was in 2015.

Despite this, we are working hard to put the foundations in place for a new waste strategy that will deliver the council’s environmental commitments. Whilst we are disappointed that the government has delayed the introduction of new legislation to extend producer responsibility for packaging, and introduce a deposit return scheme for drinks containers, we are committed to improving our services and recycling rates over the next 12 to 18 months. This will be done through a range of interventions from redesigned collection services to improved engagement and enforcement.

Compared with predominantly urban LAs, with levels of high deprivation, our performance is in the top 50% and top 25% for areas with a similar population. There is room for improvement, as there always is, and we are always happy to benchmark our performance with comparable councils.”

Question 17

Councillor Galvin to ask the cabinet member for wellbeing and culture the following question:

“One Norwich Practices, which provided an estimated 120,000 essential appointments to patients a year in our city, including through the much-used Walk-In Centre, collapsed, and went into receivership in January due to severe financial issues. Could you please explain the assessment the council has done on the impact the transition of service is having on the health landscape and risk to patients in Norwich, including the steps it has taken to engage with partners to try to minimise risk to patients, including vulnerable service users?”

Councillor Kidman, the cabinet member for wellbeing and culture's response:

“Thank you for your question.

At the council meeting on 28 November 2023, the previous cabinet member's response to a similar question from you was that the city council looked to Norfolk County Council as the responsible body for public health and health scrutiny to review this matter further.

At this same meeting the cabinet member's response to a question from Councillor Price also on this subject, provided:

“reassurance about our continued work to provide services to some of the most vulnerable within our communities by saying that: the city council will continue to provide vital services to individuals who present as homeless, as well as the work it does to prevent homelessness and support some of the most vulnerable in our communities.

As Norfolk County Council has responsibility for public health and health scrutiny, any questions about the impacts of this important service need to be taken up with relevant county council colleagues or those responsible for commissioning the services of OneNorwich Practices.”

Question 18

Councillor Price to ask the leader of the council the following question:

“On 28 November 2023, the Council passed a motion committing to signpost to residents the resources to assist them in making informed choices on who they bank with, with particular reference to ethical considerations including fossil fuel exposure, on the Norwich City Council Website and on Norwich City Council social media channels. What actions have been taken with regard to these resolutions since November?”

Councillor Stonard, the leader's response:

“The council can make their own pledges, but it does not have any duty or power to steer its residents in relation to persuading them about making informed decisions regarding who they bank with.

Given this, it would be entirely inappropriate for the council to use any of its communications channels for this particular matter.

However, we will continue, within the powers and resources available to always encourage residents to consider ethical and sustainable choice and our support and promotion of such policies such as using local credit unions is example of this.”

Question 19

Councillor Hoechner to ask the cabinet member for resources the following question:

“I understand that no more than 80 people can be allowed into the Council Chamber due to fire safety requirements. At the full council meeting on 30 January, people were sent into the overflow room even though well less than 80 people were in the Council Chamber, as can be seen on the YouTube recording. Assuming that numbers in the Council Chamber are being closely monitored, it should be possible to only send those members of the public to the overflow room who can no longer be accommodated safely within the Council Chamber. Was there a specific reason why the Council Chamber was not filled to capacity before people were directed to the overflow room, seeing that the quality of the attendance experience in the overflow room is certainly lower than that of being in the actual Council Chamber?”

Councillor Kendrick, the cabinet member for resources' response:

“We are always pleased to have more people interested in attending, but the fire safety requirements in the Council Chamber means we can accommodate a maximum of 80 people in the room which includes councillors, our officers, guests, and security. If we become aware that there may be a significant public presence, an overflow room is set up to assist in trying to enable as many members of the public as possible to see and hear the meeting, and we ensure security officers are present on site to assist in the appropriate management of the meeting locations and the safety of all attending. These decisions are made primarily considering safety, risk assessment and public access to the meetings.

Several factors can influence the decision to utilise a second space proactively:

- Anticipated numbers of those people who have indicated their attendance.
- Ensuring comfortable occupancy: Reaching or exceeding the designated capacity, even slightly, can lead to a feeling of overcrowding and discomfort for participants. By occasionally utilising a second room, we aim to maintain a comfortable environment conducive to productive engagement.
- Anticipating increased attendance: If there's a possibility of additional participants arriving, having a second room prepared allows for a smooth transition and avoids last-minute adjustments that could disrupt the event flow.
- Facilitating efficient movement: In case of an emergency evacuation, having participants spread across two designated spaces allows for a quicker and more orderly process.

When we are aware of exact numbers, we are able to make adjustments to the arrangements as the Lord Mayor did at the last meeting of full council to allow members of the public into the chamber at an appropriate time.”

Question 20

Councillor Osborn to ask the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety the following question:

“In January 2023 residents reported damage in Talbot Square due to flooding, and a major repairs works order was logged. A target completion date was set for March 2023. In November 2023 residents contacted me to say the repairs had not been done and they had heard nothing despite reporting again. I sent in a Civica Enquiry on 23 November, and on 19 December, I was told that NCSL had been contacted for an update. On 12 January 2024 I was told in a separate response to my enquiry that NCSL had now been instructed to carry out the repair. Please can the Cabinet Member explain why the initial major repairs order was not fulfilled and why it has subsequently taken nearly two months to get it reinstated?”

Councillor Jones, the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety's response:

“The initial order was issued to NCSL on 13 January 2023 to remove existing ceiling boards and renew, whilst creating new loft access following a flood at the property. These works were not completed satisfactorily.

A further order was raised by Norwich City Council's property services team in early 2024 and issued to NCSL's major works team. These works are scheduled to be completed week commencing 11 March 2024.

Significant work has been undertaken over the past 6 months to improve systems, and in the creation of additional operational roles to improve tracking and communication with residents. As part of the ongoing improvement NCSL have also introduced daily checks on work orders to verify their status, and take additional action as required.”

Question 21

Councillor Calvert to ask the leader of the council the following question:

“At the last cabinet meeting Councillor Stonard seemed to suggest that an annual 28% increase in Freedom of Information requests was the result of opposition councillors making requests. Does the portfolio holder stand by that analysis given that less than 1% of FOI requests in the last year were from councillors?”

Councillor Stonard, the leader's response:

I disagree with the suggestion from the Leader of the Norwich Greens that the number of FOIs the Council receives represents a level of mistrust or a lack of transparency. The Council have seen an increase in the number of requests received. This trend is not limited to Norwich City Council as other public authorities and neighbouring councils have seen a similar or even greater increase in the number of requests. The increase in the number of requests, received under either the Freedom of Information Act and / or the Environmental Information Regulations, between 2022 and 2023 was 13%.

I would add that despite this increase, the Council provided on-time response to over 95% of requests in 2023, this I would suggest, highlights our dedication to transparency and public engagement. However, I agree with your analysis that less than 1 percent of all requests received are from Norwich City Councillors..”

Question 22

Councillor Lubbock to ask the leader of the council the following question:

“Recently I have become aware of councillors being excluded from public meetings and not being informed of consultations which affect their area. I feel this amounts to not treating councillors with the respect their position deserves and purposely preventing them from effectively carrying out their duties as a city councillor.

Examples of such exclusion. There was an event convened by the council on Parks & Open Spaces which I heard about from a resident who had attended the event. Another was the 'online' consultation on the refurbishment of the children's playground in Eaton Park which I came across by accident.

I find this attitude of 'side lining' councillors very disrespectful. How are we to represent our residents and encourage their participation in such events when we ourselves are excluded from even knowing about them?”

Councillor Stonard, the leader's response:

“Please can I assure you that councillors are not being excluded from involvement in matters that they should be involved in.

I believe the Parks and Open Spaces event that you refer to was one held at Norwich City Football Club. This event was aimed at organisations involved in the management, maintenance, conservation and enhancement of our parks and green spaces. This included representatives from organisations such as the wildlife trust, county gardens trust, friends' groups, volunteer organisations from across the city. 120 delegates attended from over 60 organisations. Some members did attend as representatives of the environmental organisations.

It was specifically to assist in the early stages of preparation with the Parks and Open Strategy which is shortly to be discussed at scrutiny and will be considered through council processes during the next civic year.

With regard to the Eaton Park consultation, you should have been informed. Please accept my apologies for the omission, I understand the consultation was extended to allow you to comment. I will ensure our processes require members to be alerted to consultation in their ward in future.”

Question 23

Councillor Stutely to ask the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety the following question:

“As a former Non-executive Director of Lion Homes (Norwich) Limited, I welcome the recent application for the first phase of development at the Mile Cross Depot site on Mile Cross Road, and I am proud of my own contribution to this successful venture. I also welcome the commitment to 100% affordable housing for this phase. Please can the Cabinet Member for Housing confirm that the allocation will be 100% council owned housing available for a social rent?”

Councillor Jones, the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety's response:

“Mile Cross is an exciting development and I very much look forward to this development coming through the planning process. If we gain planning permission, officers will then continue to develop the design and continue to assess the overall residential viability of the scheme. It is only then can we take a view on the overall affordability to HRA and formally agree the rent levels that will be set.”

Question 24

Councillor Davis to ask the cabinet member for regulatory services the following question:

“At Budget Council last month, the accepted Independent Group Amendment allocated an additional £150,000 for Licensing enforcement resources. It was understood and agreed that this would generate two additional Enforcement Officers. The amendment was agreed following the decision to make an existing temporary enforcement officer a permanent role. Please can the Cabinet Member with responsibility for Regulatory Services confirm that the additional resources agreed at Budget Council will be allocated to a further two enforcement roles to ensure this council has three enforcement officers in 2024/25.”

Councillor Fulton-McAlister, the cabinet member for regulatory services' response:

“The council decision was to agree an additional £150,000 of one-off resources to support the important work of licensing services. The use of a previous underspend in this way recognises that offsetting permanent savings were not identified at the same time as reserves do not support the permanent recruitment of staff, it will however help us to invest in the enforcement team on a long term self-funding basis. This cash injection will afford us the opportunity to deploy immediate action where needed which we envisage will be across both licensing and enforcement activity; this might be seen through some short term staffing resources to focus on specific areas but might also require the use of relevant companies with skills to carry out other more specialist work, for example inspections, or where a team might be more effective if obtained from a single contractor rather than the council seeking to recruit to a number of temporary roles. This will all take place alongside the evaluation of the impact of the digitalisation, which is happening across the service and will, as a result, inform the case for any future budget provision considerations including whether any net additional permanent resource is needed.”

Question 25

Councillor Oliver to ask the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety the following question:

“Security entry door systems at the entrances to our blocks of flats are vital to help people feel secure in their homes and deter anti-social behaviour. We welcome all new installations and upgrades to existing systems. However, we are aware of long delays with some blocks in my ward, Town Close, and across the city. Please can the Cabinet member for housing explain why there have been such long delays, and confirm that promises made to our residents for installations this coming spring will go ahead?”

Councillor Jones, the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety's response:

“The installation of new doors and access control systems is under review. We are looking at how this can be streamlined and made more efficient. It should be borne in mind that in every instance we are required to assess the viability of actually installing such a system so that they are fully compliant with current regulations. We then have to undertake S20 consultation with leaseholders and obtain planning consent before we can contractually commit to undertaking the physical works. Our current programme for 2024-2025 comprises c 80 blocks where new door entry systems will be installed, and further schemes will be assessed as these are identified.”

Question 26

Councillor Everett to ask the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety the following question:

“Independent councillors often support residents that are waiting for repairs to their properties, and we always hope that things will go smoothly. However, often they do not, and residents are left with out-of-pocket expenses. The complaints procedure is hard to follow, and the nature of complaints often misunderstood which leads to delays and further problems.

What is being done, to include work on better accessibility, to streamline the process and ensure residents receive an adequate review and response, and, where appropriate, outcomes that accurately reflect all reasonable costs?”

Councillor Jones, the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety's response:

“Our aim is to always put something right when it has gone wrong for our residents. Each individual circumstance is decided on a case-by-case basis with regards to out of pocket expenses in consultation with the resident.

We offer an accessible service to make a complaint whether it is by email, telephone, online or post. We have a clear complaints policy which is aligned to Ombudsman requirements and best practice.

Our complaint handlers are trained to act to resolve complaints promptly and fairly. We are aware we need to improve the time taken to respond to some complaints and to fully understand the nature of the complaint, which we are taking action to address.

From April 2024 we will be obliged by law to follow the requirements of the Housing Ombudsman’s Complaint Handling Code, which will drive further change that will benefit residents.

Finally, we review the complaint process annually to assess if further improvements can be made to ease the customer experience. Should you, or any other councillor, have specific suggestions please do share these.”

Question 27

Councillor Champion to ask the cabinet member for communities and social inclusion the following question:

“As with an ever-increasing number of reports, there have been delays to the release of the Parks Audit, which would allow insight into the context of other initiative, such as the Biodiversity Strategy. The council could take inspiration from interesting projects in other areas of the country, such as insect hotels, edible gardens, and rewilding. How will the council use the Parks Audit to help meet its biodiversity objectives, which increase the city’s resilience in the face of climate change, as per one of the pillars of the new corporate plan?”

Councillor Giles, the cabinet member for communities and social inclusion's response:

“Progress on the Parks Strategy will be reported to Scrutiny Committee next week and is underpinned by an audit of open spaces based on quality and value. Over 100 sites have been audited to date, including all parks. Separate condition surveys and accessibility audits of all 81 play areas have been completed. The audit of all sites is scheduled for completion by the end of this month.

Work on the Strategy has also entailed a full review of a wide range of current policies and need to be reflected in the strategy and this includes the biodiversity strategy. Parks Officers have also been heavily involved in the recent Biodiversity Baseline Study carried out by the county council and this is reflected in the Strategy. There will be clear recommendations emerging in the strategy highlighting priorities to further enhance the natural green spaces we already manage as well as priorities for other spaces, identifying opportunities for enhancing biodiversity, whether through changes to management regimes sensitive to community wishes and heritage, increasing the number of pollinators, and tree planting initiatives.

Our small team of officers work incredibly hard achieving a huge amount for our parks and open spaces. As you will be aware parks and open spaces is a non-statutory service, and I would call on the Government to reflect to value local communities place on their parks and open spaces by providing local authorities with revenue funding to manage them.”

Please note that the following questions are second questions from members and will only be taken if the time taken by questions has not exceeded thirty minutes. This is in line with paragraph 53 of Part 3 of the council's constitution.

Question 28

Councillor Galvin to ask the cabinet member for climate change the following question:

“The Island community group does regular litter picks of its area and routinely gathers over six sacks of litter. In the area around Distillery Square, just off Dereham Rd there are a dozen or more shops including food outlets, and just one standard size bin which often becomes full, with the litter then blowing out and about. Residents are trying to make this area nicer, including with the help of the community team gardening an unkempt bed.

Following my requests, officers have agreed to investigate replacing a standard bin with an enclosed bin, with recycling facilities in it, such as the ones outside city hall and around the city to assist in keeping the area tidy. Could you investigate asking local retail outlets to help with the cost of providing such bins?”

Councillor Hampton, the cabinet member for climate change's response:

“The Council works well with many local retailers to keep local centres clean. Many provide their own bins and we do seek to identify sponsorship opportunities where possible. Although this is made more difficult by the challenging environment in which many retailers are operating.

On this occasion, as we had dual bins in storage and the area was covered by an existing contract, it was more straightforward for us to replace the bin, but we are happy to take forward further discussion with retailers in future.”

Question 29

Councillor Osborn to ask the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety the following question:

“In September 2022, the Cabinet Member assured Mancroft councillors that CCTV would be installed at Canterbury Place in early 2023/24, using Safer Streets Funding. I was separately told that the installation would be in April 2023. I was then told “summer” of 2023, and have followed up multiple times since then. The CCTV is still not installed. When will this CCTV that has been promised be installed?”

Councillor Jones, the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety's response:

“I am pleased to confirm that following contractor delays the installation has started, I have asked the Safer Neighbourhoods Coordinator who is leading on delivery of the CCTV cameras to provide an update to Councillor Osborn directly as to when these works would be completed.”