



**COUNCIL**

**7.45 p.m. – 9.40 p.m.**

**24 November 2009**

Present: Councillors Collishaw (Lord Mayor), Arthur, Banham, Bearman, Blakeway, Blower, Bradford, Bremner, Brociek-Coulton, Cannell, Divers, Driver, Dylan, Fairbairn, Fisher, Gihawi, Gledhill, Holmes, Hooke, Jago, Jeraj, Lay, Little(A), Little(S), Llewellyn, Lubbock, Makoff, Morpew, Morrey, Offord, Ramsay, Read, Sands, Stephenson, Waters, Watkins, Wiltshire and Wright

Apologies: Councillor George

**1. LORD MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Lord Mayor announced that since the last meeting she had attended a number of events including opening the charity Christmas card shop in the Assembly House, opening the poppy shop, the justice service, Norwich Society design awards, City Club dinner, multicultural event at the Larkman School, Norwich High School for Girls prize giving, Sewell Park prize giving, Future 50 networking at St Giles Hotel, awards for young people, active sports awards, judging The Lanes shop window competition, Remembrance Service, the USAF memorial lecture with Sir Richard Danatt, remembrance service for the Mathew Project and a service for road peace.

The Lord Mayor reported, with great regret, the death of James Hehir, Chief Executive Officer of Ipswich Borough Council whose memorial service had been held earlier in the day and which had been attended by the Chief Executive Officer.

**2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor S Little declared a personal interest in item 6 – motion: closure of day care centres.

### 3. QUESTION FROM THE PUBLIC

**Mike Pendred to the Executive Member for Corporate Resources and Governance:-**

“Given that it was announced in the Eastern Daily Press on 18 November 2009 under the heading County Court Judgements at a hearing on 28 October 2009, that a county court judgement was obtained against Norwich City Council, could I ask the question, what was the debt of £1,958 for and how much were the court costs and how did the situation be allowed to occur?”

**Councillor Waters, Executive Member for Corporate Resources and Governance** said that the register of county court judgements in England and Wales shows no judgements registered against the city council. We are not aware of any judgements against the council.

**Mike Pendred** asked, as a supplementary question, if such a judgement did occur what liability would there be for individual councillors. **Councillor Waters** said that this was a hypothetical question. The council would look at any judgement made against it and deal with the matter as required based on the individual facts of the issue.

### 4. MINUTES

**RESOLVED** to agree the accuracy of the minutes of the meeting held on 20 October 2009 subject to including the correct spelling of Councillor Antony Little’s name where appropriate.

### 5. QUESTIONS TO EXECUTIVE MEMBERS/COMMITTEE CHAIRS

The Lord Mayor advised members that 16 questions from members of the council to executive members and committee chairs had been received of which notice had been given in accordance with the provisions of Appendix 1 of the council’s constitution. The questions were as follows:-

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|-------------------|--|
| <b>Question 1</b> | Councillor Fisher to the executive member for corporate resources and governance on encouraging payment of council tax.                                      |
| <b>Question 2</b> | Councillor Little(A) to the executive member for corporate resources and governance on changes to council tax and banding.                                   |
| <b>Question 3</b> | Councillor Jeraj to the executive member for sustainable city development on removal of signs.   |
| <b>Question 4</b> | Councillor Holmes to the executive member for corporate resources and governance on the effect of changes in the funding of concessionary bus fares on jobs. |
| <b>Question 5</b> | Councillor Ramsay to the executive member for corporate resources and governance on fair trade.  |

- Question 6** Councillor Makoff to the executive member for housing and adult services on the possibility of rent cuts.
- Question 7** Councillor Stephenson to the executive member for corporate resources and governance regarding scrutiny self evaluation.
- Question 8** Councillor Bearman to the executive member for housing and adult services on consultation with tenants and leaseholders.
- Question 9** Councillor Little(S) to the executive member for housing and adult services regarding housing repairs.
- Question 10** Councillor Fairbairn to the executive member for housing and adult services on the LEAP project.
- Question 11** Councillor Watkins to the leader of the council on privatisation.
- Question 12** Councillor Divers to the executive member for housing and adult services on the Local Housing Allowance.
- Question 13** Councillor Hooke to the leader of the council on the Go4Less scheme.
- Question 14** Councillor Wiltshire to the executive member for community safety and community cohesion regarding CCTV.
- Question 15** Councillor Lubbock to the executive member for community safety and community cohesion of environmental health issues relating to licensing decisions.
- Question 16** Councillor George to the executive member for housing and adult services on the monitoring of sub contractors.

## **6. MOTION – CLOSURE OF DAY CARE CENTRES**

(Councillor S Little declared a personal interest).

Councillor Jeraj moved and Councillor Ramsay seconded the motion as set out in the agenda

**RESOLVED** that council notes:-

- the proposed closure of the Silver Rooms and Essex Rooms day care centres by Norfolk County Council.
- that Norfolk County Council has stated that these centres deliver excellent services to their users.
- that the decision on whether to proceed with the closures has been delayed until after further consultation.

Resolved to –

- (1) ask the executive to respond to the consultation putting forward the views that -
  - (a) it is vital to maintain public sector social services (unanimous);
  - (b) privatisation of social services fundamentally undermines the ability of society to care for the vulnerable (27 voting for, 1 against and 7 abstentions);
  - (c) these centres provide a cost effective, accessible and high quality model of care which complements existing provision and impacts positively on the health and wellbeing of service users (unanimous);
  - (d) the Essex Rooms and Silver Rooms are well placed to meet existing and potential demand for day services within the Norwich area and they should remain in use for as long as that demand exists (unanimous).
- (2) write to the managers of the Essex and Silver Rooms, and to staff union, pledging its support for keeping the centres open (unanimous).

## **7. MOTION – JOB CENTRE RE-ORGANISATION**

Councillor Watkins moved and Councillor Lubbock seconded the motion as set out on the agenda.

**RESOLVED**, with 20 voting for, 15 against and 2 abstentions, that -

“Council notes that:

- unemployment currently stands at 2.46 million.
- there has been a sharp increase in those claiming job seeker’s allowance over the last 12 months to 1.64 million.
- in Norwich we are fortunate to have a Job Centre Plus processing income support, job seeker’s allowance, incapacity benefit, employment support allowance claims, social fund claims for most of the East of England and a specialist team dealing with benefit appeals.
- Norwich Job Centre Plus works closely with the council and aids in the processing of housing and council tax benefit claims.
- under government plans, over the next 18 months, benefit processing will be removed from many job centres and they will become 100% telephony call centres. Norwich will lose its benefit processing work and become part of a “virtual” call centre, with experienced and knowledgeable processing staff redeployed.

Council considers that:

- job centres do not “hound” claimants but actually play a vital role in maximising employment and helping people find work.
- it must continue to work closely with Norwich Job Centre Plus to ensure the effectiveness of all processes relating to new benefit claims.
- the loss of experienced processors from Norwich may result in delays, a less efficient service, and the loss of vital local knowledge and accountability.
- the government should explore ways of making job centres more efficient; however, these current reforms would be counter-productive.

Council resolves to write to Yvette Cooper MP, Secretary of State for the Department for Work and Pensions:-

- (1) asking her to scrap her plans to move all processing from Norwich Job Centre;
- (2) opposing any plan that would scrap the job centre network resulting in a reduction in the level of service provision in Norwich.

**Lord Mayor**

## APPENDIX A

### Questions to Executive Members and Chairs of Committees

#### Question 1

#### **Councillor John Fisher to the Executive Member for Corporate Resources and Governance:-**

“In view of the recent figures outlining this Council's poor performance compared to others in collecting Council Tax, would the Executive consider introducing an incentive to encourage council tax payers to pay by direct debit; for example offering the chance of a prize to all people who switched to paying by direct debit. E.g. other councils have entered all names in a free draw to win a television. Once people are signed up the direct debit they normally continue to use this method to pay.”

#### **Councillor Alan Waters, Executive Member for Corporate Resources and Governance's reply:-**

“The first point I need to address in my response to Councillor Fisher's ‘Groundhog day’ question which again repeats slighting and inaccurate observations about our council tax collection rates, is to refer him to the answer I gave to Councillor Divers at the October Council meeting. For his benefit I have quoted the relevant part of my written answer on that occasion.

‘For Council Tax collection as at September 2009 the level of collection had improved over the same period in the previous year despite the difficulties caused by the recession.

The target figure for the half year was 55.90% collected achieved is 56.03%. We would expect to be able to collect 99% + of our Council Tax although this extends beyond the 12 month budget period and is consequently reflected in future years as a Council Tax surplus, which is used in setting Council Tax. For the 2009/10 Budget this surplus was £187,000 2.1% of Council Tax.

Councillor Fisher will be pleased to know that we continue to be on target for achieving our collection rates as we come to the end of the third quarter.

On the issue of direct debit payments, we are always looking at ways to encourage residents to use this method of payment because it is an efficient and economical method of collecting council tax. However we also need to recognise that many people in Norwich find it difficult to get a bank account. This is something we are working to address by encouraging local banks to offer basic bank accounts

Councillor Fisher, I am sure will be gratified to know (just in case he has missed it) that we are investing time and resources through the ‘Bite Back’ campaign, in encouraging residents to check whether they are entitled to Council Tax and other benefits.”

**Councillor John Fisher** said he did not think the question had been properly answered and asked, as a supplementary question, whether the council would consider using similar incentives to those used by other councils?  
**Councillor Alan Waters** said that providing prizes to those that paid by direct debit

would only benefit those with sufficient incomes to be able to have a bank account. The council was always looking for opportunities to encourage people to pay by direct debit but would not be happy to provide incentives that were only available to a few. The council would be exploring all options but within a framework of equity.

## **Question 2**

### **Councillor Antony Little to the Executive Member for Corporate Resources and Governance:-**

“When dealing with a recent enquiry from a resident I was informed that if the Valuation Office change your council tax banding you can be retrospectively charged for increase in council tax - even if you have since moved out of the property and are living elsewhere. The Council Officers have very kindly told me about how to challenge this but it strikes me that this is now a political decision to take up with the government and the VO. Would the Executive Member join with me in writing to the Chancellor, Charles Clarke MP and Chloe Smith MP to protest at the injustice of residents being charged hundreds of pounds for a bill they didn't know they had to paying property that have long since left?”

### **Councillor Alan Waters, Executive Member for Corporate Resources and Governance’s reply:-**

“The factual position is when the valuation office informs the authority of a change to a council tax banding the authority is required to send a bill for the whole period of liability. This can sometimes result in a large bill; however as with income tax the liable part must pay the full amount of council tax due.

I need to know more about the specific circumstances of this case before I can respond to your question. The supplementary gives you an opportunity to do that.”

**Councillor Antony Little** said that he believed as a point of principle that retrospective taxation was wrong and asked, as a supplementary question, how the Executive Member considered the council could ensure people were not penalised for bills that they did not know they were liable for. **Councillor Waters** said that the council was obliged to recover the liability for the whole period and pointed out that in some instances people had actually been given rebates. He would investigate what the Local Government Ombudsman’s view was on this issue.

## **Question 3**

### **Councillor Samir Jeraj to the Executive Member for Sustainable City Development:-**

“When a 20mph speed limit was introduced on Trinity Street earlier this year, a large sign was installed at the Unthank Road entrance to Trinity Street. In September, the large sign was replaced with a smaller 'repeater' sign, much to the annoyance of local residents, who contacted me about the downgrading of the signage. Since then the repeater sign has been removed leaving an empty post. I have been informed that a sign is no longer necessary and that the post will now be removed. Can the Executive Member inform me as to the rationale used to justify removing a sign that was installed less than 12 months ago? Can they give assurances to the residents of Trinity Street that the Council is committed to ensuring road safety in their area?”

**Councillor Brian Morrey, Executive Member for Sustainable City Development  
reply:-**

“Trinity Street is part of the new 20mph limit installed in April this year in the Vauxhall Street and Newmarket Street area.

When the new signs were sited, the fact that Trinity Road joins Unthank Road which already has a 20mph limit was overlooked. The existing larger entrance 20mph sign to Unthank Road was mistakenly kept and a larger entrance 20mph sign facing into Trinity Street at this junction was mistakenly installed. This is contrary to the relevant statutory instrument.

This mistake having been brought to our attention, a decision was taken to exchange the two larger signs with smaller repeater 20mph signs to ensure compliance with Department for Transport regulations. As part of this review, it was also decided to move a repeater sign near No.3 Trinity Street further up the road towards the junction with Rupert Street as it was felt this area would benefit with an extra repeater sign.

I apologise for confusion that may have been caused. However, the changes were necessary to ensure that the signs are compliant with the regulations and therefore enforceable.”

**Question 4**

**Councillor Adrian Holmes to the Executive Member for Corporate Resources and Governance:-**

“What effect will the recovery of £1.4 million from changes in the funding of Concessionary Bus Fares have on the job losses announced by Norwich City Council on the 5<sup>th</sup> November?”

**Councillor Alan Waters, Executive Member for Corporate Resources and Governance’s reply:-**

“We welcome the announcement as potentially good news for the City Council. This has been the result of significant lobbying by the City Council and others.

However I do need to remind Councillor Holmes of the bigger picture which he seems to have missed in framing his question and challenge assumptions he has made about job losses.

- The City Council has not announced any job losses. We have started a formal consultation process on a range of draft proposals, and no final decisions will be reached on the 2010/11 budget proposals until that consultation is complete
- The Government announcement marks the start of a consultation process, which will not be completed until the end of December 2009. This means that:
  - The final outcome of that consultation is unknown, and may well differ from the £1.4m figures currently being proposed



- Any new funding that the City Council receives is not likely to materialise until around spring 2010, i.e. after the 2010/11 budget and draft savings proposals have been agreed and implemented
- We estimate that so far the City Council has lost over £3m from the changes in concessionary fares funding, so a figure of £1.4m will only cover a fraction of those losses
- Whatever the final sum that is agreed for Norwich, it will be a one-off amount, and not repeated in future years, and so cannot be used to support ongoing financial commitments (such as staffing)
- There are still a wide range of significant other financial risks which may adversely affect the City Council's medium term financial strategy, including:
  - Uncertainty about the level of Revenue Support Grant settlement for 2010/11
  - Possible central government constraints on the level of Council tax that we can set for 2010/11 (risk up to £350,000)
  - The outcome of the First Bus appeal on concessionary bus fares (risk up to £800,000)
  - Triennial pension review (between £200,000 and £300,000)
  - This list is not exhaustive and there are a number of smaller risks but nevertheless significant that could have a negative impact on Council's finances

All of these factors mean that the current financial situation remains complex and uncertain. In this light, the Executive is proposing a prudent and cautious approach. We therefore do not propose to make any changes to the current savings proposals, and propose to complete the current comprehensive consultation processes. We will also continue to monitor the financial situation closely, and will consider any possible changes as part of the budget setting processes for 2010/11 and beyond.

Members will be aware that the current proposed savings package totalling £6.3m will not fully close the budget gap, and that savings in the region of £2.1m will still need to be achieved in 2010/11 and 2011/2012. Any improvements in the financial position will have an impact on the remaining savings programme that still needs to be developed."

On a final point – I have yet to see anything from the Green Group on the Council about how they would deal with the funding gap – over and above endorsing the strategy of the Labour administration. Would Councillor Holmes wish to frame a supplementary question to my answer that offers some Green Party proposals?"

**Councillor Adrian Holmes** asked, as a supplementary question, whether the Executive Member would point out to the government that it was wrong that the council should get the bill for this situation whilst banks received funds from government. **Councillor Alan Waters** said that he had hoped that Councillor Holmes would pick up the final point in his written response. He emphasised that this administration had worked very hard to limit the effect of the global economic situation on services and jobs in Norwich.

## Question 5

**Councillor Adrian Ramsay to the Executive Member for Corporate Resources and Governance:-**

“Norwich achieved Fair Trade City Status on 25 February 2005. The City Council supported the city's bid for Fair Trade Status and a monitoring group was set up to work with Fair Trade in Norfolk to ensure commitment to Fair Trade in Norwich. Following the demise of Fair Trade in Norfolk, the monitoring group has asked to meet at City Hall in order to carry out the work that is necessary for the city to keep its Fair Trade Status. Part of this includes the monitoring of City Council activity. However, the volunteers have been told that they must pay, out of their own pockets, for a room at City Hall so that this can happen. Is it possible that the council could provide a place for the monitoring group to meet to help Norwich keep its Fair Trade status?”

**Councillor Alan Waters, Executive Member for Corporate Resources and Governance's reply:-**

“The first point I would make is that Norwich City Council's Fair Trade status is secure. We continue to meet our obligations as a Fair Trade City and these are reflected in a range of key council documents including our procurement and environmental strategies. Over the past two years I have held meetings with a committed but ad hoc group of people who have an involvement in fair trade issues. These have been productive meetings. I have always hosted those meetings at City Hall. I suspect what has happened is that the active membership has now changed again and my contact details have not been passed on. If you would like to give me the name of the person who contacted you I will give them a call and set up a meeting.

What appears to have happened in this instance is that a general enquiry was received and the standard prices quoted.”

**Councillor Adrian Ramsay** said that he had heard earlier that day that the council had indicated it would allow fair trade meetings to be held in City Hall for no charge. He welcomed this and asked, as a supplementary question, whether Councillor Alan Waters would continue to be involved. **Councillor Alan Waters** said yes.

**Question 6**

**Councillor Ruth Makoff to the Executive Member for Housing and Adult Services:-**

“The Government recently announced that housing association tenants will receive a 1% cut in their rents. Will council housing tenants receive the same cut in their rents?”

**Councillor Brenda Arthur, Executive Member for Housing and Adult Services' reply:-**

“The government has not yet announced its proposals for council rents for 2010/11, though this is expected imminently. The administration would welcome a reduction

for council tenants matching that announced for housing association tenants, rather than increases similar to this year's 3.1% as has previously been suggested.

However as we are still being asked to ensure convergence of rents with Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) it is likely that tenants rents will increase though clearly by much lower amounts even if the -0.9% inflation factor is used. The impact of convergence depends not only on the gap between formula and actual rent but also on the length of the convergence period which has been adjusted in recent years to give a longer period for the "catch up" to be effected. We have not as yet heard from the Communities and Local Government (CLG) since last year on their view as to when convergence should be.

While the inflation linked element of each tenants rent increase will be the same the element linked to the convergence on formula rent will differ for each tenant depending on how far away their formula rent is from their actual rent. So only the few tenants whose actual rents already equal formula rents would receive a reduction of exactly 0.9% if we were asked to apply the same formula as RSLs

Last year we made representation to the government about the rent increases and building on the success of last year will be doing so again this year. We have also made a commitment to tenants that we will be working more closely with them when looking at rents for next year.

It is also worth noting that while tenants in RSLs will gain individually from having lower rents the social housing sector will not gain. Indeed as a result of a reduction in income from rents it is predicted that RSLs will be not be able to build as many properties in the coming year. "

**Councillor Ruth Makoff** asked, as a supplementary question, how tenants would be involved in discussions on setting rents. **Councillor Arthur** said that a sub-group of the citywide board was looking at this issue.

## **Question 7**

**Councillor Claire Stephenson to the Executive Member for Corporate Resources and Governance:-**

"Does the portfolio holder agree that regular evaluation of the scrutiny process across the council is essential in order to engage all councillors and officers in that process assess related training needs and to ensure that the scrutiny function is being properly fulfilled? Consequently, does he agree that it would be beneficial to the council for councillors to complete a self-evaluation questionnaire on scrutiny before Christmas?"

**Councillor Alan Waters, Executive Member for Corporate Resources and Governance's reply:-**

"The short answer is 'Yes' – and for the following reasons:

Self evaluation for scrutiny is considered best practice by the Centre for Public Scrutiny and a scrutiny professional as it is a useful tool in assessing strengths and

weaknesses. This can be helpful when designing training for both members and officers as well as seeing where the process may require strengthening. If the self evaluation process engages those filling it in, in such a way as to think about how they engage with the process as much as how the process engages with them we should be able to gain an informed view of where we are, where we need to head and what training is required for members and officers.

Scrutiny should regularly ask itself; is scrutiny doing what it was intended for? Perhaps, if we can't honestly and openly evaluate ourselves, how can we be tasked to evaluate others and encourage openness?

I very much hope that Councillor Stephenson gets an early Christmas present of completed scrutiny questionnaires from council colleagues.”

**Councillor Claire Stephenson** said that the council would be more likely to get high scores in future assessments if it had a strong scrutiny function but considered that this was being held up by lack of resources. She asked, as a supplementary question, whether the Executive Member agreed that more resources should be made available and/or scrutiny panels be set up. **Councillor Alan Waters** said that scrutiny was not a bolt on but was a function of the whole council and all councillors had a scrutiny role to undertake. He said that the new structures being put together would give an opportunity to look at scrutiny afresh including the possibility of looking at existing member bodies. He pointed out that bodies such as the Climate Change Working Party and the Contracts Working Party were, in effect, undertaking a scrutiny function. The council should look imaginatively at what we could do in the future to embed a scrutiny culture across the whole council.

## **Question 8**

**Councillor Janet Bearman to the Executive Member for Housing and Adult Services:-**

“Could the Executive Member for Housing update us on current progress and topics covered by the consultation exercises being carried out by Plus Four Market Research with tenants and leaseholders?”

**Councillor Brenda Arthur, Executive Member for Housing and Adult Services’ reply:-**

“Plus Four Market Research Ltd was commissioned by the Council in response to the recommendations by the Audit Commission in that we needed to ‘develop an effective programme of consultation and engagement with tenants & leaseholders in developing the service. We were clear at the time that we not only wanted additional capacity to undertake this important piece of work but that we also wanted to assure tenants and leaseholders that the exercise was being undertaken by an independent body.

A ‘Tenants Panel’, made up of 1,000 tenants and 200 leaseholders’ representatives has been recruited. This panel is demographically balanced in terms of age, gender, neighbourhood and property type.

The panel has been involved with a generic housing survey, from which we have gained valuable information on tenants/ leaseholders views with regard to the

housing stock, repairs and maintenance, rent levels, anti social behaviour and consultation and engagement. These results have now been feed into the housing improvement plan to ensure that services can be developed as a result of the consultation process.

In addition, to support the objectives of the housing improvement plan, the tenants panel has also been involved in participating in a number of focus groups. These have given us valuable information around the following topics:-

- Service Access and delivery
- Service standards
- Value for Money, including the rents policy
- Tenant Involvement Framework

Currently Plus 4 are undertaking a survey looking at anti social behaviour with tenants and leaseholders. This is because the tenants panel indicated from the first survey that this was an issue of great importance them. The outcomes of this survey will feed into the housing improvement plan and to colleagues and partners who are responsible for the anti social behaviour service.

During the coming months Plus4 will be assisting us in the recruitment of tenant inspectors and mystery shoppers to enhance the opportunities to install multiple access channels for engagement and participation.

The contract with Plus Four is a two year contract which will terminate in May 2011. Over the next year it is our intention to build capacity within the neighbourhood service, which will allow us to directly manage the tenants panel and associated consultation processes building on the sound start that the work with Plus 4 has given us

The feedback from all of the Plus 4 findings is being reviewed and these together with the follow up actions will be published in the New Year through our tenant publications such as Tenant Talk. In this way we can ensure that all tenants can see how their views are shaping and improving our services and helping us drive the service forward.

We are writing to the tenants who took part in the focus groups to thanks them for participating in the process and outlining the suggestions made and what actions will follow. If there are any suggestions we are not taking forward we will be explaining why.”

**Councillor Janet Bearman** asked, as a supplementary question, how much this exercise was costing and whether the Executive Member considered it value for money. **Councillor Brenda Arthur** said that the cost of delivering an improvement plan to get the council up to a 2 star status was approximately £300,000 and yes, she considered this to be value for money. The funding issues were commercially sensitive but officers would be happy to brief individual councillors on a one to one basis.

## Question 9

**Councillor Stephen Little to the Executive Member for Housing and Adult Services:-**

“I have been informed that Council properties should be inspected every 5 years for possible repairs. However, some residents I have spoken to, for instance those of Victoria Street have had to wait far longer than that. How is the council performing against this target, both in terms of average time between inspections, and percentage of properties that have not been inspected in the last five years?”

**Councillor Brenda Arthur, Executive Member for Housing and Adult Services’ reply:-**

“Following its formation in 2006 the Asset Department in Housing Property Services (HPS) embarked on a programme of rolling stock surveys. Essentially a housing stock survey this allows us to take a more strategic view of all of our housing assets. The survey programme covers the Councils entire housing stock and is based on 20% of the stock being surveyed every year. So the whole stock will be covered over a 5 year period. The purpose of this survey is not to record or report possible repairs but to collect information on the major components within each property. This information is then used to ensure we are able to accurately forecast future investment requirements and therefore budget accordingly. Clearly if there are obvious repairing issues or if the tenant reports a repair then this is recorded and the necessary work ordered.

To make best use of our resources the surveys are carried out in the year prior to the Decent Homes upgrade programme so we can take the opportunity to record compliance against the Decent Homes Standard. Using this information we are then able to draft the upgrade programme for the following year with confidence and give our contractors and tenants a view of what work will be required to what properties.

I am pleased to report that in terms of the programme officers are currently delivering on target and we are in the last year of the 5 year programme. This means that by the end of this financial year we will be one of the few local authorities and housing associations in the country with a 100% stock survey from actual surveys carried out in-house. Most organisations work from a 5% or 10% sample survey resulting in inaccurate financial forecasts and work programmes.

So because of this work we are better placed than most to be able to know and manage our stock. This enables us to make more informed strategic decisions and as importantly ensures a more effective and efficient service for our tenants.

Looking specifically at Victoria Street, the neighbourhood of Mansfield – Queens Road, which includes Victoria Street, was surveyed in June/July of 2007 with the Decent Homes upgrade programme following in 2008/09.”

**Councillor Stephen Little** said that many residents considered the Decent Homes Survey was too limited. He asked, as a supplementary question, whether the Executive Member considered it would be more cost effective to link the survey to checking for repairs etc. **Councillor Brenda Arthur** said that each property had been surveyed and if repairs were required she was sure that residents would report them.

**Question 10**

**Councillor David Fairbairn to the Executive Member for Housing and Adult Services:-**

“Can the Executive Member for Housing and Adult Services give an indication how the Learning, employment and accommodation project (LEAP) is progressing? What criteria have to be fulfilled for people to become part of the scheme?”

**Councillor Brenda Arthur, Executive Member for Housing and Adult Services’ reply:-**

“The LEAP project was launched in April 2009 using external funding awarded to the council in recognition of its ‘trailblazer’ status in the provision of enhanced housing options.

The scheme has received positive press coverage both regionally and nationally for its groundbreaking approach to the worklessness issue.

The project arose from recognition that homelessness and worklessness are inextricably linked and a desire to provide support services that take these two issues into account.

The project aims to help the most vulnerable and socially excluded clients within the city’s hostels access settled accommodation, training and employment.

The external funds are used to fund two posts. The first is a worklessness advisor who visits hostels to combine advice on housing options with promotion of employment, education and training opportunities to residents. The second post is a leasing officer who accesses properties for those taking part in the project and provides intensive housing support once they are accommodated.

Since its inception just eight months ago, the project has achieved excellent results, engaging over 100 clients, referring 36 into work placements, 20 into other forms of training, providing 24 with good quality private sector accommodation and helping 11 into full time work.

One of the people on placement here at City Hall worked with members of our Strategic Housing Team and others to organise a national conference on worklessness, which was recently hosted in Norwich. At this event, the Norwich LEAP project was held up as an example of excellent practice. The Communities and Local Government Trailblazer manager who chaired the event commented on the impressive and sound partnerships, which Norwich City Council has forged in developing this work. Since the event, I have received comments from a number of other authorities congratulating us on both the LEAP initiative and the conference. However, the real success of the scheme was reflected at the conference by people who have been involved with the project. They told us that LEAP has transformed their lives.

There is no criterion for involvement in LEAP although the project is currently targeted at the single homeless in hostels. The only real barrier to participation is the applicant’s willingness and ability to commit to the scheme.”

**Councillor David Fairbairn** said that his question had been submitted before he had received a leaflet on the scheme and he was pleased with the reply. He asked, as a supplementary question, what could be done for people in residential homes but who were too vulnerable to access hostels. **Councillor Brenda Arthur** said that there were limited resources and the council had not worked with people in this position.

## **Question 11**

### **Councillor Brian Watkins to the Leader of the Council:-**

“The Leader of the Council has stressed the need to "avoid privatisation". Could he explain to council what he means by this, the rationale behind his decision, and clarify whether his statement includes the outsourcing of council services to voluntary and/or community agencies?”

### **Councillor Steve Morphew, Leader of the Council’s reply:-**

“My definition of privatisation is the transfer of services currently provided by the council to other providers who operate on the basis of profit making. I have no issue with those businesses who make a profit, not those who we currently have or are about to take on contracts with us in the private sector.

However I am not at all convinced that private companies automatically offer a cheaper or more efficient level of service, especially when you compare like with like – pensions, pay rates and so on. The ability of private employers to compete by driving down pay rates has been reduced by Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations (TUPE) and minimum wage legislation. That is to be applauded. On the other hand the public sector, especially councils, have become adept at effective cost reduction and use of resources. The track record of Norwich city council under this Labour administration is a case in point.

Whilst we are addressing problems of developing accountability to residents of services provided under contract it is obvious that directly provided services are more easily made transparent and accountable.

To that extent the same applies to services provided through the voluntary and community sector. In addition it is clear that some still see commissioning, the successor to contracting, as a means of getting services on the cheap. For example, it would be an apparently easy solution for the county council to pay the economic cost for the Essex and Silver Rooms day centres to be provided through a third sector organisation and then reduce their funding in future years, thereby shifting the burden onto the third sector organisation to raise extra funds or increase charges, and, if the funding became inadequate, to close the service. If the voluntary sector is invited to take on services then the real reasons need to be thoroughly tested.

So whilst there can be great opportunities from working with both the private and third sectors, direct transfer of services is not an easy option for those of us with integrity. Once the transfer is made it is also then very difficult to bring services back in house at some later date should that become the preferred way to deliver the services.



My strong preference is to identify ways of working in partnership with private and third sector organisations to keep the accountability routes clear and make sure we add value to the innovation and ideas of others whilst sharing what we do well to enhance the results for the good of the city.

I also support developing shared services where appropriate with other public sector bodies, but the same principles should apply. We're getting pretty good and partnerships and developing a body of knowledge and experience that is getting us deals like the Homes and Communities Agency partnership, the Joint Core Strategy and enabling us to lead campaigns like the rail improvement campaigns through Regional Cities East. What we do in those partnerships the administration is directly accountable for, but we bring in new expertise and share ours with others.

So it is a bit more complicated that the old fashioned argument between public and private, and third sector. I'm pleased to say Norwich, well this administration at least, has moved beyond those simplistic arguments to how can we make the best of what is on offer for the city whilst still retaining the ability of residents to hold us accountable."

## **Question 12**

### **Councillor Joyce Divers to the Executive Member for Housing and Adult Services:-**

"Currently an estimated 300,000 people nationally on low incomes who choose to live in accommodation cheaper than the Local Housing Allowance set by their council are entitled to keep the difference - up to £15 per week. From next year, the government will scrap excess payments to local housing allowance claimants where their rent is lower than the rate of the allowance; a plan that could see some of the poorest families lose up to £780 a year in total.

Earlier this month, Nick Clegg challenged Gordon Brown directly over the issue at Prime Minister's Questions. In the House of Commons, Early Day Motion 2069, has been tabled by the Liberal Democrat Shadow Housing Minister Sarah Teather and supported by the housing charity Crisis.

Could the Executive Member tell council how many Norwich families will be affected by this policy and whether the council will be joining the campaign to oppose this latest government assault on some of the very poorest families in the country?"

### **Councillor Brenda Arthur, Executive Member for Housing and Adult Services' reply:-**

"The Local Housing Allowance (LHA) was introduced so that benefits claimants were empowered to manage their own finances and have the bargaining power with landlords. The current £15 excess gives claimants the choice of renting higher cost accommodation or using the excess towards their day to day living expenses.

The LHA rates are set by the valuation office and the local authority administers the benefit claims using the rates given each month. LHA does not apply to local authority or housing association tenants.

The number of LHA claimants in Norwich is currently 2243. 1798 claimants do not receive any excess payment. The number in receipt of an excess payment is 445 of which 44 have the maximum excess of £15. Other recipients receive anything between 50p and £14.99.

The average excess paid in Norwich is £5.83 a week or £303.16 a year.

This administration has a sound track record of working to help the very poor and people who are vulnerable. Our financial inclusion strategy for example has delivered a range of activities aimed at lifting people out of poverty and offering support.

We will not be responding to the Liberal Democrat campaign but will rather make approaches to government directly to seek assurances that money will not simply be transferred from poorer families to landlords who might raise their rents to the maximum allowance.”

**Councillor Joyce Divers** said that the reply suggested the council would approach the government directly and she asked, as a supplementary question, what was the timetable for this and who would be doing it. **Councillor Brenda Arthur** said that she would ask the relevant officers to approach the government as detailed in her response.

### **Question 13**

#### **Councillor Jeremy Hooke to the Leader of the Council:-**

“With equality for all Norwich residents in mind, will the Executive assure council that, despite the financial conditions, the Go 4Less scheme will be protected and going forward will they explore ways of making the scheme more widely available?”

#### **Councillor Steve Morpew, Leader of the Council’s reply:-**

“The Sports Development Team are always seeking to increase the number of sports and cultural venues that accept the Go 4less discount card. One of the conditions for organisations receiving a council grant is that they sign up to the Go 4less scheme. For example the Theatre Royal now offers Go 4less holders priority booking for its low cost seats, which are available for all productions.

As the aim of the scheme is to increase participation in sport and cultural activities for residents who might otherwise be financially excluded the scheme is targeted at Norwich residents on low income. Residents and their dependants who are on income support, receiving working tax credit (low income category), on housing benefit receiving income related job seekers allowance, or are a full time student can apply for a card. Qualifying disabled people and all residents aged 60 and over can now access the scheme through their Norwich City Council National Bus pass.

If Councillor Hooke has any suggestions for other avenues to explore within the resources we have available I will be pleased to hear from him.”

**Councillor Jeremy Hooke** asked, as a supplementary question, if the Leader of the Council would consider making the Go4Less card available to all Norwich City Council residents. **Councillor Steve Morpew** said that since introducing the

Go4Less scheme the council had extended its use and take up and it was a comprehensive scheme providing benefits to a great number of people. However, if it was extended any further it would require greater resources for administration and those applying would need to identify themselves. However, the point was well made and he would ask officers to look further at whether it was possible to do this.

#### **Question 14**

##### **Councillor Andrew Wiltshire to the Executive Member for Community Safety and Community Cohesion:-**

"At the previous meeting of Full Council, the Executive Member for Community Safety gave reassurances that as soon as the pillar had an electrical supply installed, the CCTV camera in the centre of Clover Hill would be re-installed, much to the relief of those living in the area and those running Clover Hill News.

Unfortunately, the electrical supply has been installed since a week afterwards but the camera is still absent, despite chasing by a number of local residents and members. Please could the Executive Member reassure local residents that this will be resolved as a matter of urgency and endeavour to find out the exact date when it will be installed?"

##### **Councillor Bert Bremner, Executive Member for Community Safety and Community Cohesion's reply:-**

"The re-fixing of the camera is of the utmost priority unfortunately delayed as the bracket required took time to manufacture and deliver, as it is not an off the shelf item.

The contractor arranging to fix the camera has advised they received the bracket on 23 November, however on fixing find the cable with the camera is not serviceable, and that will be replaced by Wednesday 25 November."

**Councillor Andrew Wiltshire** asked, as a supplementary question, why the camera had not been ready when the power supply was ready and why the old camera had been taken down before the new one was available. **Councillor Bert Bremner** said that the camera had been taken off because of the noise inside the flat it had been attached to. The problems with the brackets and wirings were unfortunate. He would advise Councillor Wiltshire as soon as the work had been completed.

#### **Question 15**

##### **Councillor Judith Lubbock to the Executive Member for Community Safety and Community Cohesion:-**

"The Licensing Sub-Committee of this council approved an extension of a late night licence for a hot food takeaway at 88 Colman Road on Friday and Saturday nights from 11pm till 12 midnight and for a delivery service from 11pm till 2am. This is a residential area.

Please would the Executive Member comment on how he envisages our already stretched Environmental Pollution officers will respond to possible calls from residents at 2am when car doors are banging, tyres are screeching, engines revving,

there is noise from the drivers of the pizza delivery vehicles and litter left on the pavements and how this affects the key objectives for 2010 to 'keep the place where you live clean, safe and healthy?'"

**Councillor Bert Bremner, Executive Member for Community Safety and Community Cohesion's reply:-**

"I have been advised that it is totally inappropriate to raise questions relating to an individual licensing application at full council. I am surprised that Councillor Lubbock does not realise this. As a member and past Chair of a similar quasi-judicial committee, Planning, and a member of the Standards Committee, Councillor Lubbock should know how improper it is for the administration to be seen to interfere with such deliberations.

In relation to the "possible calls from residents at 2am", if and when they come in, and one must not be so depressing and despairing to assume that they will, there are well established procedures in place for addressing any complaints in relating to noise and litter which the Council follows in all cases. We can assure all residents that the City Officers will monitor and respond to any consequences as that is the Council's job."

In reply to a supplementary question from **Councillor Lubbock**, **Councillor Bremner** said that it was inappropriate to raise questions relating to an individual licensing application at full Council.

**Question 16**

**Councillor Niki George to the Executive Member for Housing and Adult Services:-**

"Could the Executive Member tell me how completed works to council houses is monitored when a sub contractor carries it out on behalf of CityCare?"

**Councillor Brenda Arthur, Executive Member for Housing and Adult Services' reply:-**

"The monitoring of all works to the councils housing stock is carried out in the same way irrespective of whether it has been carried out by a main contractor or a sub-contractor.

The Councils contract for repair and upgrade work is split between CityCare and Lovell and although they may sub-contract some elements of this contract they remain responsible for any work carried out by their sub-contractors in complete accordance with the specification and contract documentation.

The Council expects both CityCare and Lovell to have a robust process for sub-contractor selection and that all work completed by a sub-contractor is inspected by the main contractors representative first to ensure it complies with the specification and we have received the required level of quality, value for money and customer

satisfaction targets are met. Once the main contractor is happy with the result, we are notified of the completed works.

Housing Property Services have a target to carry out a minimum of 5% post inspections to ensure we have received the required quality of work and value for money. Whilst 5% is the minimum target the actual percentage varies depending on the work type but typically is between 10% and 45%.”