



COUNCIL

7.30 p.m. – 8.50 p.m.

29 November 2011

Present: Councillors Lay (Lord Mayor), Ackroyd, Altman, Arthur, Banham, Bradford, Bremner, Brociek-Coulton, Carlo, Driver, Fairbairn, Fisher, Galvin, Gayton, Gee, Gihawi, Gledhill, Grahame, Grenville, Haynes, Henderson, Holmes, Jeraj, Kendrick, Little, Lubuck, MacDonald, Makoff, Offord, Sands(S), Sands(M), Stammers, Stephenson, Storie, Thomas, Waters, Westmacott and Wright

Apologies: Chris Higgins (Sheriff) and Councillor George

1. LORD MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Lord Mayor said that since the last meeting she had chaired the freemen of the city ceremony, together with the sheriff, where 34 people had received the freedom of the city; attended the celebration of 10 years of the Forum during which, disappointingly, no mention of the city council's input to the project was mentioned; laid a wreath on behalf of the city at the Armistice day service at the new war memorial followed by the service in Norwich Cathedral and attended the procession with lanterns to City Hall for the switch on of the Christmas lights. The switch on had been a wonderful event with carol singers, fireworks, council staff leading singing and Dion Dublin switching on the lights and she thanked Liz Wimms and the rest of the events team for the excellent way in which they organised this special event which was a credit to the city council and she thanked the sponsors for their generous input.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The following members declared a personal and prejudicial interest in item 7 – motion on the local government pension scheme –

Councillors Ackroyd, Arthur, Banham, Bradford, Driver, Galvin, Gayton, Gihawi, Henderson, Jeraj, Little, Makoff, Offord, Storie, Thomas, Waters, Westmacott and Wright.

3. QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

The Lord Mayor said that one public question had been received from Oliver Steward –

Oliver Steward to the cabinet member for resources:-

‘Open source software supports businesses, schools and individuals and is secure, downloadable and is licence free. Open source software is a free to download IT infrastructure that millions of people use and thousands of people work on and develop. Plus it is always up to date with no extra charges for updates. Open source software is more flexible, often cheaper and can provide more work for people living locally than be reliant on a single IT provider such as Steria. However, all the council’s IT is supplied via a 15 year contract with Steria, so there’s little scope for altering the terms and conditions, but there are regular reviews of the contract. What opportunities are there for the council to make use of the benefits of open source software.’

Councillor Alan Waters, cabinet member for resources replied:-

Whilst there are many benefits to open source software, there are also risks. The council must maintain systems and software that are safe and secure and ensure compliance with our obligations under the government secure extranet code of connection and the payment card industry standards.

The council can and does consider open source software when there is new software or software that needs to be replaced. This is currently undertaken in conjunction with our ICT managed service provider Steria Ltd.

Oliver Steward asked, as a supplementary question, would the council consider a trial run of open source software by downloading it to at least one computer to assess whether it can work in parallel to existing systems. **Councillor Waters** emphasised the need for the council to take seriously security matters and said that, for example, Bristol City Council had had difficulties meeting the required security codes with open source software. He would discuss this with officers to see if we have tried it or can do in the future and would be happy to continue the dialogue with Mr Steward.

4. PETITIONS

No petitions had been received.

5. MINUTES

RESOLVED to agree the accuracy of the minutes of the meeting held on 27 September 2011.

6. QUESTIONS TO CABINET MEMBERS/COMMITTEE CHAIRS

The Lord Mayor advised that 14 questions had been received from members of the council to cabinet members and committee chairs, of which notice had been given in accordance with the provisions of Appendix 1 of the council's constitution. The questions were as follows:-

- Question 1** Councillor Carlo to the cabinet member for planning and transport on the county council's integrated transport budget.
- Question 2** Councillor Galvin to the cabinet member for environment and neighbourhoods on community centres.
- Question 3** Councillor Makoff to the leader of the council on the closure of the UEA School of Music.
- Question 4** Councillor Grahame to the cabinet member for play, parks and open spaces on sustainable planting.
- Question 5** Councillor Jeraj to the cabinet member for planning and transport on parking restrictions.
- Question 6** Councillor Holmes to the cabinet member for planning and transport on the non display of parking permits.
- Question 7** Councillor Stammers to the deputy leader and cabinet member for resources on the closure of the Remploy factory.
- Question 8** Councillor Henderson to the deputy leader and cabinet member for resources on processing benefit claims.
- Question 9** Councillor Little to the cabinet member for housing on replacement windows in Goldwell Road and Gordon Square.
- Question 10** Councillor Storie to the cabinet member for housing on the government's change to feed in tariff.
- Question 11** Councillor Lubbock to the deputy leader and cabinet member for resources on publishing senior managers' expenses.
- Question 12** Councillor Wright to the leader of the council on the King's Lynn incinerator.
- Question 13** Councillor Fairbairn to the cabinet member for customer services on possible partnership with the Post Office network.
- Question 14** Councillor Ackroyd to the deputy leader and cabinet member for resources on council tax discounts on second homes.

(Details of the questions and replies together with any supplementary questions and replies are attached at Appendix A to these minutes.)

7. MOTION – THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT PENSION SCHEME

(The following members, having declared a personal prejudicial interest, left the chamber and took no part in the discussion or decision on this item - Councillors Ackroyd, Arthur, Banham, Bradford, Driver, Galvin, Gayton, Gihawi, Henderson, Jeraj, Little, Makoff, Offord, Storie, Thomas, Waters, Westmacott and Wright)

The Lord Mayor said she understood, Councillor Waters having declared an interest and left the chamber, that Councillor Sands (M) would be moving item 7. She said that an amendment to his own motion had been received from Councillor Sands (M) which had been circulated.

With no member objecting, the following amendment was accepted and became part of the new substantive motion –

‘To delete ‘pensions’ from the resolution and replace it with ‘the local government pension scheme’.

Councillor Sands (M) moved and Councillor Bremner seconded the motion as set out on the agenda and amended as above.

RESOLVED, with 18 voting in favour, 1 against and 0 abstentions, -

‘The local government pension scheme (LGPS) is a good quality pension scheme that benefits from being funded and locally managed. It is valuable to the council as an employer and employees alike.

The Local Government Association wrote to the Chancellor on 16 February 2011 to express concerns at changes proposed by the government would be both undesirable and damaging to the LGPS.

The Trade Unions have agreed to organise local and national protests in support of public services, jobs and to defend the LGPS.

Council therefore, **RESOLVES**, to call on the two Norwich MPs to press the government to hold meaningful negotiations on pensions and reach an agreement to avoid strike action’.

8. MOTION – QUESTIONS BY MEMBERS TO CABINET

Councillor Jeraj moved and Councillors Stammers seconded the following motion –

‘In light of the reduction and frequency of full council meetings and hence the reduction in opportunities for councillors to ask questions to cabinet members and committee chairs, council **RESOLVES** to amend procedure rule 22.1 of Appendix 1 of the council’s constitution by deleting ‘rules 10 and 11’ and inserting ‘rules 10, 11 and 12’ to allow councillors to ask questions at cabinet meetings.

Councillor Arthur moved and Councillor Waters seconded that the matter be referred to the constitution working party and with 21 voting in favour, 16 against and 0 abstentions it was –

RESOLVED accordingly.

LORD MAYOR

APPENDIX A

Questions to cabinet members and committee chairs

Question 1

Councillor Denise Carlo to the cabinet member for planning and transport:-

“In 2011/12, Norfolk County Council’s cabinet cut the Integrated Transport Budget (ITB) (for small safety measures) by 80% in order to divert the money to road maintenance (since when the government has awarded Norfolk an extra £7.5m grant for maintenance) and to the development of major schemes (NDR, Postwick Hub, Great Yarmouth 3rd river crossing). The county council allocates just 10% of the countywide ITB budget to Norwich. This small share does not reflect the city's role as a regional capital and the heavy transport pressures on the city from residents and visitors from outside of Norwich. In 2012/13, the county council officers are recommending to Norfolk county council cabinet that £215,000 should be allocated to the city. This includes just £20,000 for minor works, with nil funding for unclassified roads. City residents' requests for small safety measures are being routinely turned down as a result. Will Norwich City Council ask Norfolk County Council’s cabinet to restore the Integrated Transport Budget to the full amount and to double the city's percentage share of the Integrated Transport Budget from 10% to 20%?”

Councillor Bert Bremner, cabinet member for planning and transport’s reply:-

“I share your concern that investment in transport infrastructure has been cut by central government. As part of its spending review, the government cut transport capital funding and in the case of Norfolk this represented a decrease from the original £49.7 million allocation in 20010/11 to £27.4 million in 2011/12.

This capital funding pays for both structural maintenance (such as re-surfacing) and improvement schemes. Faced with such a significant decrease the county council cabinet decided to prioritise structural maintenance and as far as possible to preserve previous levels of expenditure. As a consequence funding for improvement schemes has had to be reduced from approximately £12m, down to £2m for the entire county.

Faced with this difficult reduction I accept, on balance, that priority has to be given to maintenance. Deterioration of the highway is of major concern as condition is so fundamental to ensuring safety and comfort for all road users: be they pedestrians, cyclists or drivers – the users of Edinburgh Road and The Avenues which I know is of concern to Councillor Carlo. Also it is much cheaper to repair highways in good time. For example the cost of an early intervention such as surface dressing (‘tar and chip’) is some ten times less than resurfacing.

At present there is a significant backlog in addressing structural maintenance requirements in the county. However, in overall terms the county’s budget for structural maintenance is only some £25 million p.a. compared to a need of about £30 million p.a. simply to keep deterioration levels as they are. To remove the backlogs would require £70 million. To divert more into improvement work,

therefore, would simply increase this backlog and make structural repair more expensive once it had to occur.

Turning to the share of the improvement budget that the council receives, with the considerable reduction in the improvement budget it has taken time to adjust to the new environment. In both this year's and last year's bid there has been an overriding concern around affordability which may have masked more fundamental questions around need.

Formula based funding approaches are very difficult to manage. It is difficult to settle on the factors to take into account and they often end up being immensely complex. The county council's approach to assigning both its structural maintenance and improvement budget is, therefore, to use need as the basis.

Hence, whilst I would also like to see greater budget for Norwich looking to 2013/14, my suggestion would be to adopt a similar approach to that which was followed last year when the Norwich allocation was uncertain. That is officers are asked to present a list of prioritised and justified improvement schemes for Norwich Highways Agency committee (NHAC) to recommend (e.g. pedestrian crossings, cycling schemes, etc.) allowing the county to fully understand needs in the city – as well as in the rest of Norfolk – and for their cabinet to allocate the resources they have accordingly.

As part of this process I would like to see the NHAC bid to be considered earlier in the budget cycle, say at the September meeting to allow more time for consideration at the county. Furthermore I would like to see members being more involved in the shaping of the bid, and will ask officers to consider how this can be achieved.

Finally I would like to see structural maintenance schemes dealt with in the same way

The funding situation will continue to be challenging until government begins to release more capital investment into local transport. However, whilst what I have set out does not alter the 2012-13 situation, I am confident that it would improve matters ensuring the needs of Norwich are fully considered.”

Councillor Denise Carlo asked, as a supplementary question, if she could take up the offer to be involved once officers had considered how members could be more involved in shaping the bid. **Councillor Bert Bremner** said no problem.

Question 2

Councillor Lucy Galvin to the cabinet member for environment and neighbourhoods:-

“The many residents who use the community centres of Norwich for a range of activities from christenings to funerals and all stages of life in between are keen to keep their centres, which they largely run and manage themselves in a variety of ways. In uncertain times such centres could well prove to be a rock of mutual support for young and old. The city council has admitted it is reviewing centres and how they are run, possibly with a view to closing some, but has given users no

chance to participate in the review so far. When will users be asked for their ideas on how to make their centres more efficient and guarantee their future?"

Councillor Julie Westmacott, cabinet member for environment and neighbourhoods' reply:-

"There are no proposals at this time to close any community centres. As Councillor Galvin is aware the scrutiny committee have identified this topic as an area they wish to look at in more detail. I welcome scrutiny committee's involvement. In this context it would seem that the question is both premature and potentially scaremongering. I am therefore at a loss to understand why the question is being asked other than to score cheap political points and create uncertainty in the community centres.

For clarity at their next meeting, members of the scrutiny committee will consider a proposal to establish a task and finish group to look at the provision and use of community space in the city. Community space includes community centres, church halls and other meeting rooms/facilities available for use/hire by community groups and members of the public for local activities.

The review should include engagement with the operators and users of these facilities and this will be for scrutiny members to decide. The outcome of the review will be reported to the cabinet and in my view it would be disingenuous to members of the scrutiny committee and very unfair to the users of and volunteers who run the council's community centres for me or others to speculate on the outcome."

Councillor Lucy Galvin said she was concerned that there would be insufficient time to carry out meaningful consultation with users of community centres and she asked, as a supplementary question, if she could be assured that residents and users would be involved in any discussion about the future of the centres and when would this happen? **Councillor Julie Westmacott** said that she had already assured members that no decision would be taken without the users and management committees being consulted. However, she welcomed scrutiny committee being involved in the process and it would not be appropriate to pre-empt that scrutiny committee work.

Question 3

Councillor Ruth Makoff to the leader of the council:-

"Does the leader share my concerns that the proposed closure of the University of East Anglia (UEA) School of Music will have a detrimental impact on cultural life in the city?"

Councillor Brenda Arthur, leader of the council's reply:-

"I have been aware of growing concern about the proposed closure of the School of Music at UEA and the strong public support that has been expressed. As a result, I wrote to the Vice Chancellor expressing my concerns and asking for an explanation as to the reasons for the proposed closure.

His reply was as follows:

'Thank you for your letter of 11 November about the School of Music at UEA. I hope that the following information will be helpful in formulating your response.

Three weeks ago, I received the conclusions of a Panel of senior UEA colleagues commissioned by me to review the future of the School of Music at UEA. The Review Panel recommended that music as an academic discipline at the University should not continue once the students in the current cohort had completed their degrees. This is a recommendation that I, with the support of the University's Executive Team (the senior management team), am taking forward to the University Council, having consulted first with Senate. Staff and students in the School and colleagues in the wider University were informed of the news on 26 October.

The Review Panel report underlines the contribution of music to the cultural and social life of the University. This is why it is very important for everyone engaging in this debate to note that the Review recommends firmly that the extensive outreach activities carried out through the School of Music, including its programme of concerts and its orchestras, choirs and ensembles should continue and should continue to be supported by a subvention from the University. In particular, the University is anxious to safeguard the opportunities for our students, for staff from across all disciplines and divisions and for the general public to participate in the flourishing choirs, orchestras and other recreational and outreach activities which have hitherto been supported through the School. This emphasis on high-quality music performance is very much in keeping with the founding ethos of Benjamin Britten.

In contrast, the Review Panel makes a compelling case that UEA should withdraw from research and, once the present cohort has completed, from the teaching of music at undergraduate and postgraduate level. At a time when every university is facing difficult decisions about how best to prioritise its investment, the School of Music at UEA cannot meet the scale of the demands now being made. The major School review carried out in 2002 warned of the repercussions should it be unable to achieve significant expansion and yet its attempts to do so since then have not borne fruit. At the same time, the external context has become markedly more challenging. The School's research has not progressed in a manner that gives any prospect that its performance in the next assessment under the Research Excellence Framework (REF) will either secure appreciable Funding Council research income or enhance its reputation. It shows no signs of earning research grant income to ease its financial situation. We are also at a pivotal moment where undergraduate numbers are concerned. To attempt to grow the School's undergraduate numbers under the new fees regime would require us to divert resources from other disciplines. In a harsh and increasingly competitive and market-focused environment, I am afraid that this is a step that UEA as a whole cannot afford to take, as much as such language jars in describing academia and academic endeavours.

The final decision on the future of the School of Music rests with Council which meets on 28 November. Senate was consulted on 9 November.

Whatever Council may decide, the University is determined to ensure that current students in the School of Music are strongly supported and are able to complete their studies successfully.'

I want to thank the Vice Chancellor for his full and open response. In this current climate we are all being forced to face extremely difficult decisions and have to make unpalatable choices which none of us want to make. The Vice Chancellor's answer shows just what happens when we seek to apply the market economy to higher education. It just doesn't work and courses in many institutions of learning will, I believe, increasingly become casualties of this approach to the detriment of our society.

Although the proposal is deeply regrettable, I am at least reassured that the University is proposing to continue the programme of concerts, orchestras, choirs and ensembles so that the life of the city and its people are not deprived of these activities."

Councillor Ruth Makoff asked, as a supplementary question, what views of the council were presented by the council's representative in the UEA's discussions on the future of the Music School? **Councillor Brenda Arthur** said that the chief executive officer is an independent member of the UEA board and she would have made board members aware of my views. She emphasised that this was a sad reflection of the market economy being involved in education but it was inappropriate for her to comment on the UEA's decision any more than it would be appropriate for the UEA to comment on the council's budget decisions after carrying out its own consultation. She was thankful that the UEA had recognised the importance of the contribution to the city and that the outreach work would continue.

Question 4

Councillor Lesley Grahame to the cabinet member for play parks and open spaces:-

"In moving from bedding plants to sustainable planting, will the council ensure that all future contracts specifically include reference to bio-diversity, use the mapping done by planning services and by Norfolk Wildlife Trust to maximise the potential for wildlife spaces and community gardens and set up a process to allow for some growing of food by and for local people, closer to home, and outside existing allotment plots, for which there are long waiting lists?"

Councillor Deborah Gihawi, cabinet member for play parks and open spaces reply:-

"The management of open spaces owned by the council is determined by us and not our contractors. All sites are managed according to its use, any management plans that are in place, suitability and where appropriate guidance from recognised bodies such as the Norfolk Wildlife Trust. Where possible we do encourage biodiversity with many examples across our sites including the creation of wildflower areas in our parks including Earlham Park, Millennium Green, Wensum Park, Eaton Park, Woodrow Pilling Park and most recently St. Clements Eco-park. Most of our herbaceous planting is designed with attracting bees, insects and butterflies.

The council also works with others such as the Sustainable Living Initiative on Bluebell South allotments where tenants are encouraged to grow their own and share allotment space. They work together as a community aimed at working with nature and growing food for local use.

Other examples include controlled grazing of some of our grasslands and wetland natural areas and recovery of a previously neglected site at Eaton Common. We are always looking for ways to increase bio-diversity and welcome the opportunity to work with local communities to explore where this is feasible including the development of community gardens. Much of what can be done will be determined by the site, its surroundings, the local community and, for land owned by the council, any future asset management plans with regard to development and the like.”

Councillor Lesley Grahame asked, as a supplementary question, how bio-diversity would be built into consideration on future planting schemes? **Councillor Deborah Gihawi** said that she regularly went out with officers to look at parks and open spaces and was very impressed with their knowledge and their willingness to embrace any new ideas and suggestions made by the public. She could only reinforce the answer she had given above and reminded Councillor Grahame of the following answer she had given to a related question at the July council meeting as follows –

Over the years, the council has created many wildflower areas in our parks including Earham Park, Millennium Green, Wensum Park, Eaton Park, Woodrow Pilling Park and most recently St. Clements Eco-park.

Where possible we have introduced ‘wildlife friendly’ mowing regimes in parts of Rosary and Earham Cemeteries. Using GNDP money, the Mousehold Heath wardens have created a demonstration heathland area and a separate wildflower meadow on part of a school playing field on Heartsease Lane. Both these features are on formerly close-mown grassland. Local volunteers have helped in managing Rosary Cemetery, Mousehold Heath and other areas. In total 1,278 volunteers were involved in the management of open spaces and gave over 4,000 hours of time to specific projects across the city over the last year.

Most of our main grassland or wetland natural areas are managed by controlled grazing, which encourages a wide diversity of flowering plants. Grazing is also used to recover previously neglected sites: at Eaton Common, for example, the re-introduction of grazing has largely eradicated ‘problem’ species such as docks and thistles, whilst desirable wildflowers such as Ragged Robin, Yellow Rattle, Meadow Saxifrage and Southern Marsh Orchid have greatly increased (2 Marsh Orchids recorded in 2006, 178 in 2011). On natural areas where grazing is not practical, at least part of the natural area will be managed to encourage wildflower-rich grassland, often through a Conservation Cut.

We are always looking for ways to increase bio-diversity and would welcome the opportunity to work with our local communities to explore where this is feasible.

She added that she was very happy to visit the parks and open spaces with Councillor Grahame if she wished.

Question 5

Councillor Samir Jeraj to the cabinet member for planning and transport:-

“Several residents have complained to me in the past few weeks that they have received parking tickets for parking on the forecourt immediately in front of the garages they rent from the council. Despite following this up with officers, I have been unable to find a satisfactory response. Can the cabinet member explain why these restrictions have been placed?”

Councillor Bert Bremner, cabinet member for planning and transport’s reply:-

“The council's enforcement officers are only able to legally issue a Penalty Charge Notice (PCN) where there is a contravention on the highway covered by a Traffic Regulation Order, or when a vehicle is parked without a valid permit or ticket within housing area residents’ car parks or off-street public car parks covered by a Parking Order.

Where garages are located within a housing residents’ parking area, garage tenants do not automatically qualify for a permit for that residents’ car park. In these cases garage tenants must always ensure that they do not park their vehicle in front of the garage, as they will risk receiving a PCN. This is in order to prevent misuse of the wider residents parking area, covered by the Parking Order.

In some cases the council rents garages where there is some small area of council owned land immediately in front, and which does not form part of the highway or a housing residents’ car park. In these instances a PCN would not be able to be issued to a vehicle parked on such private land in front of the garage. If a PCN is incorrectly issued in these circumstances the council will of course rescind it.”

Question 6

Councillor Adrian Holmes to the cabinet member for planning and transport:-

“On two occasions recently Mancroft residents have been issued with court proceedings for non display of parking permits. In both cases the resident was in possession of a valid parking permit which had fallen off the windscreen of their car. In both cases the resident had contacted Norwich City Council to explain the circumstances leading to the non display. The issuing of court proceedings is especially harrowing for carers and those on low incomes who feel the council is not interested in taking account of their circumstances. Is it the policy of Norwich City Council to relentlessly pursue people who have paid for their permits but fall foul of the display rules without compromise?”

Councillor Bert Bremner, cabinet member for planning and transport’s reply:-

“If a motorist fails to display a permit, disabled badge or parking ticket then the civil enforcement officers will issue a Penalty Charge Notice (PCN) accordingly. If a permit, badge or ticket is subsequently produced, however, the council can waive the PCN the first time it occurs. In waiving a PCN motorists are reminded of the need to

properly display a permit, badge or ticket as challenges against a PCN would generally not be accepted for a repeat offence.

The council will follow up unpaid PCNs in order to recover the sum owed. In addition this process reminds the motorist of their rights to challenge a PCN. If the council does not accept a challenge the motorist can still refer the matter to the independent Traffic Penalty Tribunal (TPT). If the TPT uphold the council's position the matter is referred to county court to enable the collection of the debt via a bailiff warrant.

At any point the council can consider ways to mitigate the financial impact of the PCN, should such representations be made. For example we could reduce the charge to the original lower level or consider a payment plan

The process preceding a bailiff warrant involves the council writing to the customer on four separate occasions inviting them to apply. However, as may be appreciated if a motorist fails to contact the council following a PCN being issued, inevitably the matter will end up with the county court for a bailiff warrant to be issued.

Nevertheless, even after the warrant is issued and prior to collection of the debt, it may still be possible to cancel a PCN or consider a payment plan. This will depend on representations received, and bearing in mind that this may cost the council if the bailiff has incurred charges at that point."

Councillor Adrian Holmes said that he was worried by an over-zealous pursuit of permits and the effect this would have on vulnerable people and he asked, as a supplementary question, if the portfolio holder agreed that vulnerable people should be invited to contact their councillor to try to resolve issues before they went too far?

Councillor Bert Bremner said that he was happy to talk to Councillor Adrian Holmes if he was concerned about any individual issues.

Question 7

Councillor Amy Stammers to the deputy leader and cabinet member for resources:-

"The Remploy factory at Raynham Street is currently under threat of closure. Whilst segregated employment for the disabled is an outdated practice, does the cabinet member agree with me that there should be another way forward other than the closure of these factories and sending the workforce into a labour market which already has over 2.6 million unemployed?"

Councillor Alan Waters, deputy leader and cabinet member for resources' reply:-

"In June 2011, Liz Sayce, the Chief Executive of RADAR (Royal Association for Disability Rights) carried out a review commissioned by the government into arrangements for disability employment support including Remploy which is an executive non-departmental public body sponsored by the department for work and pensions. The review was followed by a period of public consultation which ran until 17 October 2011.

The review's proposals suggest that support for segregated employment should be phased out in favour of helping disabled people to get and keep jobs in the general labour market. The review suggests that money should follow the individual rather than funding specific employment providers. This would be achieved by expanding the existing access to work programme through releasing funding currently spent on Remploy. This is the basic principle underlying the Sayce Review which found that *"notwithstanding the commitment and contribution of those employed by Remploy, there was a total consensus among disabled people's organisations and charities that the factories were not the model for the 21st century"*.

The separate Remploy business which helps people into mainstream jobs aims to support 20,000 workers by 2013 and could become a social enterprise under the plans.

Trade unions representing many of the people still working at the remaining factories are opposed to their closure. However, leading disability charities are backing the review proposals - recognising that the current Remploy model is neither sustainable nor fit for purpose. The review points out that none of the 15 Remploy factory business streams is currently profitable. The units lose a total £63m a year and each employee is subsidised by an average £25,000. The Sayce review concluded that reallocating resources could increase the number of disabled people being helped from 65,000 to almost 100,000 - 35,000 extra people could be supported into work for the same price it costs to support the 2,300 people currently employed in Remploy factories.

We are largely in favour of the key messages within the Sayce review which recommends diverting funding to assist people with disabilities into mainstream employment rather than segregated employment. However, we are concerned about the implications for the 50 employees at the Raynham Street factory. It is important that they are all given basic support and information to help them access employment. There are a number of agencies which have a mandate to proactively support those affected should the closure go ahead. For example, Job Centre Plus assistance will be given through their rapid response teams and the disability employment advisors. We will seek assurances that government funding is being diverted into more appropriate forms of support rather than being cut. We will also keep in close contact with agencies such as Jobcentre Plus to ensure that any local people made redundant from Remploy receive the support and assistance necessary to get them back into work.

Further to this, if the proposals do go ahead the factory will not close immediately. It may be the case that local Remploy management are already investigating a suitable social enterprise or Community Interest Company (CIC) model to provide a bridging service for employment services. This is perhaps a course of action that they need to consider, including the identification of transitional and long term funding alongside the preparation of a sustainable, 3-5 year business plan for approval by government."

Question 8

Councillor Jo Henderson to the deputy leader and cabinet member for resources:-

“Could the cabinet member report the length of time taken by the council to process benefit claims, the length of time taken to process change of circumstances in such claims, and how the council allocates staff and resources to these processes?”

Councillor Alan Waters, deputy leader and cabinet member for resources’ reply:-

“The average time taken to process a new claim in 2011-12 is 24 days and a change of circumstance 16.5 days. At the same time last year the average was 26 days for new claims and 14 days for changes of circumstance.

Last year a Lean review of the benefits team enabled the council to improve efficiency in the benefits team and so make significant savings of 7 FTE, and this made a considerable contribution to the council’s savings target for 2011-12. The service has had to adjust to the new resource level and this has taken some time, but through reviewing the processes and the relationship with the customer contact team officers are confident that the 2010-11 performance can be improved on significantly.

The resource level is adequate and proportionate in the current financial circumstances of the council.”

Councillor Jo Henderson welcomed the information average figures and asked, as a supplementary question, what was the maximum time that could be taken to process a new claim? **Councillor Alan Waters** said that he would have to check with officers and get back to Councillor Henderson with that information.

Question 9

Councillor Stephen Little to the cabinet member for housing:-

“Councillors were told that windows in Goldwell Road and Gordon Square were due to be replaced before the end of March 2012, having originally missed out in 2010. We have now been informed that this will not be done until after some time after that date despite many of the windows being in a very poor state of repair. Would the cabinet member make every effort to see if this work could be brought forward?”

Councillor Victoria Macdonald, cabinet member for housing’s reply:-

“As all members are aware in January 2011 a procurement process began to award a contract to complete the replacement window programme for all council owned housing stock. This process has been completed and the contract awarded to Anglian Building Products (ABP). The contract is for window installations to approximately 4,400 properties, the largest in the eastern region and at a scale of the entire stock of many social landlords. Immediately after the award of the contract

we engaged with ABP to start discussion around mobilisation of the contract and programming. An implementation of up to 3 years was agreed.

ABP have been carrying out various surveys including where structural works will be required in advance of the window installations and the statutory leasehold consultation process is also being carried out. Both of these elements are critical in terms of drafting an installation programme that can be made public as they both have a bearing on the actual installation date. It is anticipated that the installation programme will be finalised by the end of November 2011 at which time (or shortly after) it will be made "public" and placed on the council's website, and sent to all members.

ABP started to fit windows during October 2011 and are currently fitting approximately 200 windows (20-25 properties) every week. This will drop around the Christmas period before increasing after the Christmas break to the peak of around 300 windows (30-35 properties) per week.

It is unclear where the message about the window installations for Goldwell /Gordon Square being carried out before March 2012 came from. As far as the new installation programme is concerned the proposed date has always been September/October 2012. It may have been the case that the original installation date under the previous contractor was before March 2012 but as members will appreciate everything has moved back due to the delay caused by the necessity to procure a new contract.

Unfortunately it is not possible to move these sites forward as it would then create a knock-on effect within the rest of the programme with other properties having to move back. Therefore it is difficult to make a case for one property being moved ahead of other properties and clearly some tenants will have to wait longer than others. Of course every effort will be made by the council and the contractor to deliver ahead of the programme but this cannot be guaranteed.

However, wherever a tenant is facing repair issues with their windows, we would always urge them to contact the council in order that repairs can be undertaken in a timely fashion, regardless of the window replacement programme."

Question 10

Councillor Jo Storie to the cabinet member for housing:-

"What impact will the recent government changes to the feed-in tariff have on our scheme to put photovoltaic panels on three thousand local authority properties?"

Councillor Victoria Macdonald, cabinet member for housing's reply:-

"Within a matter of days of the council opening a tender for installation of solar panels on council dwellings the government issued a consultation document proposing a major reduction to the level of feed in tariffs payable. The consultation runs to the end of December but the changes will be introduced from mid December – effectively giving businesses only 6 weeks to revise their business plans. It was known that the tariff would be reduced from April 2012 but this surprise

announcement has caused widespread uncertainty and some considerable anger for householders and suppliers alike. The city council is no exception.

The expectation is that the timing and scale of reduction in tariffs mean that “PV 4 Free” schemes (such as our proposal) will not be deliverable from a financial point of view. The supplier is still considering their position but unless there is a change of heart by the government then it is likely that they will be forced to withdraw their tender. Should this be the case and if the council is unable to find an alternative scheme that is financially viable then several thousand tenants will lose out on the opportunity of a measure that would have helped to reduce fuel poverty.

Across the country many social housing landlords are facing similar decisions and it is clear that a number of proposals have been abandoned. Many individual householders that had committed to the installation of solar panels are also reviewing their position. In turn many fledgling businesses have had to lay off staff in order to stay afloat or are indeed having to close down altogether.

There is serious concern about the soundness of the decision making process surrounding the consultation paper and particularly the decision to implement the key element (i.e. reduction in tariffs) before the consultation period has closed. As a consequence, a number of challenges to this process are being considered or are proposed. In view of the significant adverse impact on tenants Norwich city council has decided to join, as an interested party, a legal challenge being launched by the Friends of the Earth. One of the outcomes being sought by the FoE is to delay the implementation date for a tariff change to April 2012. If successful this would enable the council to implement a scheme in the manner currently proposed. In joining this challenge as an interested party the council will have the benefit of a well organised challenge with limited direct involvement and minimal cost. “

Councillor Jo Storie asked, as a supplementary question, if there was any background information as to why the project had been delayed leaving the council in this position? **Councillor Victoria MacDonald** said that the cabinet had needed to fully investigate the possible options, including the suggestion proposed by Councillor Makoff when she made representations to cabinet that the council should look at self financing the project, hence the delay.

Councillor Stephenson moved and Councillor Gee seconded that this matter be referred to the Sustainable Development Panel for consideration and with 31 voting in favour, 0 against and 5 abstentions, this was –

RESOLVED accordingly.

Question 11

Councillor Judith Lubbock to the deputy leader and cabinet member for resources:-

“In the interests of transparency would the cabinet member agree with me that this council should follow the example of many other local authorities and publish online all expenses claimed by senior managers?”

Councillor Alan Waters, deputy leader and cabinet member for resources' reply:-

“Councillor Lubbock will no doubt be aware that details of senior managers’ emoluments are already disclosed through the transparency pages of the website, and through the notes included in the annual Statement of Accounts. This complies with the government’s guidance on financial transparency and with international financial reporting standards.

We also publish, on a monthly basis, a full list of our financial transactions of over £500.

Given the considerable pressures on the council’s finances, and on the council’s finance staff, we do not propose at this time to divert resources from more productive work to elaborate on the considerable quantity of information already published.”

Councillor Judith Lubbock said that there had been cases reported nationally where senior managers in other councils had used expenses inappropriately including expensive away days at golf clubs etc. She asked, as a supplementary question, how the council tax payers of Norwich could be sure that the council’s managers were not acting in a similar way if all details were not published?

Councillor Alan Waters emphasised that the council complied with government guidance on transparency and reporting standards. Officers and councillors were mindful of the pressure the council was under and all councillors should be aware of the excellent work officers have done to drive down costs and reduce expenditure to protect services. He hoped Councillor Lubbock would understand and accept that the council was transparent.

(Councillor Gee said that he objected to the tone of the supplementary question and the motivation behind it and asked that this be recorded.)

Question 12

Councillor James Wright to the leader of the council:-

“I understand that the Tory run county council is seeking support for their King’s Lynn waste incinerator proposal from those district councils that are members of the Norfolk Waste Partnership. Could the leader of the council please advise me as to whether or not the city council has been approached by the county council on this matter, and if so what her response to them has been.”

Councillor Brenda Arthur, leader of the council’s reply:-

“Along with all district councils in Norfolk, the city council was consulted on the planning application for the proposed waste to energy plant at Kings Lynn. From a land use planning point of view there are no direct impacts on the city, so no comments were made on the application. As an active member of the Norfolk Waste Partnership the issue of disposal has been discussed but we have focused our efforts on the role of the council as a waste collection authority. This includes looking at how all the local authorities in the county can work together to enhance the level of domestic waste that is reused and recycled. Therefore, our involvement in the waste disposal debate has been at directing our involvement at reducing the

volume of waste that the county council has to dispose of, rather than direct engagement in the issue of how this waste is dealt with.”

Councillor James Wright said that in Materials Recycling Weekly and other sources the Secretary of State had been quoted as expecting the county council to be able to demonstrate support for the incinerator for it to go ahead. With limited public support he asked, as a supplementary question, if the leader of the council agreed that the city council should not offer its support to Norfolk County Council?

Councillor Brenda Arthur said that the council was aware of the judicial review. We continued to engage in the Norfolk Waste Partnership and she had seen examples of how objects could be produced from waste that was not burnt. However, she maintained the line in her original response as to where the council's priorities and involvement should be directed.

Question 13

Councillor David Fairbairn to the cabinet member for customer services:-

“In light of the government's £1.34 billion investment to modernise and subsidise the Post Office Network; their commitment to no more Post Office closure programmes; and this council's closure of some neighbourhood offices. Will cabinet investigate following the example of Sheffield City Council by entering into a partnership with Post Office Limited, that aims to use the network of local sub post offices across Norwich to deliver as many council services as possible, with the objectives of saving council taxpayers money, improving access to local services for residents and improving the revenues that flow through our sub post offices.”

Councillor Julie Brociek-Coulton, cabinet member for customer services' reply:-

“The council already uses the network of post offices across the city to collect payments for the city council. By using post offices and pay points to collect cash for the council savings of £111,051 of tax payers' money have already been made when the cashiers' service was closed in 2010. Closing the cashiers' service was a phased programme during which we identified those people that were paying by cash in city hall, identified the nearest alternative facilities for them to pay in cash at – which includes post offices, and then directing them to these places.

This work is clear evidence that we have already encouraged people to use post offices to make their payments, and we have done so in a customer focussed way, using all of our insight into customer behaviours and habits.”

Question 14

Councillor Caroline Ackroyd to the deputy leader and cabinet member for resources:-

“Would the cabinet member for resources agree that given the present acute housing shortage, it is time to end the current practice of providing council tax discounts on second homes? Would she also agree that there is no justification for providing incentives for people to own houses that are left standing empty, as

happens at present, but that an empty homes premium should be charged on the council tax payable on properties that have been empty for two years or more?"

Councillor Alan Waters, deputy leader and cabinet member for resources' reply:-

"Currently there are 250 second homes on the system; this can fluctuate either up or down. The average council tax is band D at £1,562.10. The discount given is 10%, therefore the cost is £39,052.50 per annum. However this is included in the tax base calculation which determines the RSG, if we collected 100% our tax base would increase and therefore the RSG would decrease. Therefore it is not a loss to the council itself.

Changes to the discretionary elements of the council tax base will have to be agreed by council when it receives the council tax base report in January (prior to budget council). I think there will be an opportunity to consider the practicality of any changes that can be made on the second homes element at that time. The council would not gain any additional income but there is a matter of principle to consider.

On a broader, point, even if the council were in receipt of additional income from changes to the second homes discount, £39,000 is not going to go very far to tackling the acute housing shortage. The coalition government, through lack of investment, is presiding over some of the worst house building figures since 1923. Access to decent housing and living space will further compound this problem by changes proposed in the welfare reform bill; including the cap on housing benefit and under occupancy rules."