



Council

30 January 2024

Questions to cabinet members

Question 1

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

“Homelessness has sharply risen across Britain since 2010 and I am aware that this council has taken significant steps to tackle it. I was therefore surprised to see the City Council being accused of having an “inhumane” policy with regards to this. Does the cabinet member for social housing agree with this accusation?”

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

“Our approach to dealing with rough sleeping in Norwich is person focused, compassionate and successful. Our services work with the client to understand their needs and wishes, ensuring that we have the right provision and support in place to help them off the streets.

The council has a specialist team dedicated to assist rough sleepers, supporting Pathways Norwich, the outreach service, working with church partners to deliver a winter shelter for people who would otherwise be sleeping rough from November to March. We are the only local authority in the area to provide a winter shelter for people who would otherwise be sleeping rough. This is in addition to the 500+ beds available through the city’s hostel system.

Many of those sleeping on the streets have complex needs and may be entrenched. Accessing the winter shelter is often the first step toward building relationships with the help and resources we have available.

Our approach is successful. The annual DLUHC (Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities) verified rough sleeping count shows an 80 percent decrease in rough sleeping numbers in Norwich since 2016, opposed to national and regional patterns. The latest figures, due for release in February, will show a further reduction.

We will continue our efforts to develop our services for those in the greatest need. I have confidence that this will ensure we and our valued partners are able to provide the best support for people sleeping rough in Norwich.”

Question 2

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

“As a strong supporter of social housing, I was pleased to read that just before Christmas the council took ownership of 22 new eco-friendly homes in Bowthorpe, with some tenants moving in before Christmas Day itself. This must have been a huge boost for those new tenants. Can the cabinet member comment on progress to develop the rest of the site so that further tenants should be able to begin their tenancies?”

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

“Indeed, it is very pleasing that our commitment to building new homes continues. The build programme at Threescore continues to move forward positively and the council will be in a position to advertise and let new homes on a monthly basis from February through to July of this year. I pleased that we then will have 76 high quality and much needed new homes occupied on this phase of the Threescore site. I am greatly looking forward to further council housing being brought forward on further sites in due course, especially at the former Mile Cross depot where planning proposals should be submitted shortly.”

Question 3

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

“Shortly before Christmas I read in the Guardian newspaper a shocking headline which said, “children have bowed legs: hunger worse than ever, says Norwich school”. The headteacher of West Earlham infant and nursery school gave a graphic and profound account of the searing poverty and the impact that this was having upon children in this area of our city. In the face of this ever increasing and desperate poverty, can the cabinet member for communities and social inclusion comment on what actions this council can take to tackle poverty in the city?”

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

“Like every city across the country, we are confronted with the challenges posed by the existing poverty within our society. This inequality is the driving force for much of what we do as leaders and champions of the city; we remain wholly committed to the reduction of inequality in all its forms. We maintain strong working relationships with local service delivery partners, both statutory and in the voluntary sector, and continue to work towards our 2040 City Vision, as we promote Norwich’s growth towards a truly creative, liveable, fair, connected, and dynamic city.

We are working closely with health colleagues and partners in relation to the report in West Earlham, taking preventative support services direct to their door through the Wellness on Wheels bus.

Our Norwich Health and Wellbeing Partnership is soon to mobilise its strategic action plan to reduce health inequalities; it has a dedicated workstream focused on addressing food poverty. We have also provided some funding for the recently opened Earlham based social supermarket, bringing the total number of social supermarkets across the city to six.

Our neighbourhood and community enabling team has been working with people to ensure they are able to access help and support through the Household Support Fund, issuing almost £230,000 to over 1,200 households this financial year. This is in addition to the planned work and support identified through our Sustainable Warmth Strategy, and the commissioned social welfare advice and support provided by our Financial Inclusion Consortium.

Our Living Wage City campaign continues to raise awareness of the blight of insecure, low paid employment and will encourage employers to become accredited, ensuring employees in Norwich are paid a fair wage. Living Wage Week provides an opportunity to raise awareness of the importance of this, and the Action Group’s communications team ensure that we get our message heard by as many people as possible through radio interviews and media articles. We are also supporting the formation of a Women’s Advisory Board, who will be specifically focused on the economic needs of women.

We continue to target our work into those areas that need it most, in our Reducing Inequality Targets Areas, and partners are joining us in this focus, as we do all we can to make Norwich a fairer city. This will be a key theme in our new Corporate Plan for 2024-2029.”

Question 4

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

“As a councillor for Catton Grove, I am regularly contacted by fellow constituents desperate to attain council housing in the city and I am aware that there are over 4,500 people currently on register. At the same time, the council is losing around 140 homes per year through the enhanced Right to Buy, with a consequent loss of £19m per year in rent. It is evident to me that this policy and the difficulty building new council housing at pace has produced a housing crisis both locally and nationally. Can the cabinet member comment on the loss of homes since 2010 with the associated income deprived due to this?”

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

“With 146 homes sold in 2022/23 and 52 so far in 2023/24 through right to buy policy, alongside, 4,500 on our waiting list we face a challenging housing landscape. The capital receipts from these sales are being reinvested into both constructing new council homes and upgrading the council’s existing homes. This dual approach is crucial in both expanding our housing capacity and ensuring that our current homes meet the required standards. By investing in these upgrades, we not only enhance the quality of life for our residents but also extend the lifespan of these homes, making them viable housing options fit for the future.”

Question 5

Councillor Vaughan Thomas to ask the cabinet member for resources the following question:

“In recent weeks the focus on the number of local authorities declaring themselves as effectively bankrupt has skyrocketed and caused understandable concern and fear amongst citizens who receive vital public services. Can the cabinet member for resources comment on the local government settlement, announced just before Christmas, with its impact on this council in relation to whether we face a similar threat?”

Councillor Kendrick, the cabinet member for resources' response:

“The local government finance settlement is still provisional and members will be aware of the announcement of additional funding being added to the final settlement. These additional funds are welcome as is any recognition of the financial pressures that local government faces both now and in the future.

Norwich City Council is not immune from these pressures but, in recognition of the historical good financial management of the authority’s resources, the council has been able to steer well clear of the problems encountered by those local authorities that have needed to declare a S114 notice to date.

The future funding of local government is still uncertain, which increases the difficulties in planning in the medium term and consequently also increases the risks that have to be managed. Norwich City Council is fortunate to be able to build upon solid financial foundations, but will need to continue to be prudent in its outlook and vigilant in exercising financial control.

Details of the financial settlement and the implications for the council are set out in the reports progressing through the Scrutiny Committee, Cabinet and onto Full Council during February, which I am pleased to say reflect a balanced budget for 2024/25 without the need to draw upon reserves.”

Question 6

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

“Given the importance of building accommodation to tackle homelessness, and particularly rough sleeping, can the cabinet member for housing and community safety comment on the record of the administration and whether she feels this goes far enough?”

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

“The council is steadfast in its commitment to addressing homelessness and rough sleeping through new initiatives and effective collaborations.

I'm pleased to report that we have successfully secured Rough Sleeper Accommodation funding in the majority of government funding rounds, taking a proactive approach to securing resources for critical projects.

Collaborations with housing association partners have yielded tangible results for vulnerable clients, including six new flats at Webster Court, seven homes at Ketts Hill, specialist Housing First accommodation for young people, and plans to deliver 12 homes at Netherwood Green. Additionally, the council maintains a commitment to Housing First principles, providing 16 dedicated properties for clients transitioning directly from the streets.

The allocation of revenue funding, alongside the capital funding required to build the new homes has meant that individuals at risk of rough sleeping have benefited from a wide range of support. This helps to break the cycle of entrenched rough sleeping and gives people the best chance of a better life.

By seeking out and applying for relevant funding streams, the council is continually responding to the evolving needs of the community. Furthermore, the focus on general needs through our partnerships including the Norwich Orwell Partnership, Lion Homes, and engaging with private developers underlines the council's commitment to those in housing need.”

Question 7

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

“I am proud to be a Labour councillor and have always believed in the difference that co-operative ways of working, through collective power and purchasing, can make for public services. The advent of Big Switch and Save, pioneered by this council nearly a decade ago is a good example of this and how it has been expanded across Norfolk, including providing solar panels. Can the cabinet member for climate change comment on progress with the latest sign ups for both the Solar Together and Switch and Save auctions which completed late last year?”

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

“As Councillor Thomas has noted, Norwich City Council was one of the first local authorities in the country to run collective auctions for energy bill switching and solar panels, pioneering an approach that is now utilised across the country. Both the Solar Together scheme and the Big Community Switch energy scheme continue to be key planks of our work to enable residents to save money and reduce their emissions, supporting the city’s transition to net-zero and our response to cost of living concerns.

The most recent Big Community Switch auction has only just finished, and as such the final figures are still unknown. However, the June 2023 auction, which is the latest that we have figures for, proved exceptionally successful with 237 Norwich residents switching as a result. Because of the Big Community Switch, these residents were able to fix their energy bills at a below market rate, providing bill savings, certainty, and access to a 100% renewable tariff.

The 2023 Solar Together auction has been equally as successful, with 114 Norwich residents accepting offers for discounted solar panel installations. This has beaten our own 2022 numbers, and is nearly double the amount of signups that other Norfolk local authorities received in 2023.

The Council remains committed to both schemes and will continue to run these auctions to ensure that residents have the opportunity to save money and reduce their emissions. The success of these also highlights the importance of collaboration and collective action, and as such the council continues to be open to exploring equally innovative schemes to support Norwich in reaching net-zero by 2045.”

Question 8

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

“Investing in council housing is a top priority for this Labour council and I was therefore pleased that just before Christmas the cabinet voted to support an important update to the Housing Revenue Account business plan which will help deliver new kitchens, bathrooms, windows, doors, roofs, insulation, but also £66m to improve energy efficiency and carbon reduction measures including installing cavity, loft and wall insulation, draught proofing, and improvements to heating systems. Solar PV systems will also be installed where most effective. Can the cabinet member elaborate further on the very real physical differences this will make?”

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

“As identified the physical improvements will be delivered as part of the “whole house approach” to the planned delivery. The physical differences will be in-line with the findings of the stock conditions surveys and will indeed fall into the categories that you have identified. The aim is to tie in number of improvement measures that will deliver a holistic approach rather than a series of separate measures that only delivery partial benefits.

This significant programme of investment will transform both the condition our housing and the lives of tenants, whilst at the same time reducing the impact our stock has on the climate. We're taking a 'whole house approach' to investment, which means efficiently packaging works so that all necessary improvements are carried out at the same time. This minimises disruption to tenants and improves cost efficiency, so we maximise outcomes for every pound spent. The programme not only modernises homes but will make them future proof as well. Living spaces will benefit from new kitchens, bathrooms and improved ventilation, the envelope of dwellings will better retain heat which reduces the cost of energy and renewable energy systems will be installed to greatly reduce greenhouse gas emissions.”

Question 9

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

“Norwich people are rightly proud of their history and heritage and that includes city icons such as the Halls. Investment in our historic built-up environment and the opportunity to enhance our cultural agenda within the city remain important to this Labour led council, so I warmly welcomed the success of securing £3.6m worth of grant funding to transform this unique heritage asset. Now that the Halls have finally closed and re-development will begin, can the cabinet member discuss her views on how this investment will interlink to a much wider enhancement of the cultural provision in the city?”

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

“The redevelopment of The Halls is a really significant and exciting opportunity for Norwich and will enable this important and historic venue to fully contribute to the cultural ecosystem of the city.

The investment will vastly improve the experience for visitors, performers and staff alike and will include a major upgrade to the sound and lighting system, make the venue more accessible and welcoming to all, and improve bar and café facilities. As a mid-size venue, The Halls plays an important role in the variety of venues across the city, allowing a wide range of performers and creatives to showcase their talents.

The project has support from our cultural partners and the Creative City Compact, and we are working closely with them to ensure the redevelopment can maximise benefits for the wider creative sector.

Our Action Plan for Culture, published last year, sets out our commitment to a number of areas of work to help maintain and expand the City’s cultural offer, including the Halls redevelopment, the continued provision of free events, the use of our assets to support our cultural sector and many other activities. The Plan is a stepping stone to a full Culture Strategy which will be complete in Summer 2025.

The importance of our cultural offer to the vibrancy of Norwich, and the opportunity it provides to create a sense of community and aspiration amongst our most disadvantaged communities, are key focus areas in our upcoming corporate plan, demonstrating how serious we are about this important work.”

Question 10

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

“When I first came to Norwich over 50 years ago, I was in awe of the Tree population along the roads and streets of our city making it so green and pleasant. Until recently, our city maintained those trees and was engaged in regular replacement and renewal using this as an opportunity to bring in more native species that supported pollinating insects. Ever since the loss of the Norwich Joint Highways Agreement, however, I regularly receive comments and concerns from residents who witness street trees on highway land no longer replaced and the general erosion of the city’s once proud coverage. On land which is still responsibility of this council, can the cabinet member for communities and social inclusion comment on recent bids to secure more trees within the city.”

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

“Norwich City Council maintains 38,092 individual trees located in parks, open spaces, housing areas, car parks, cemeteries, and churchyards around the city.

There are also an estimated 300,000 trees within woodland groups that are not individually recorded.

Norwich has many treelined roads and leafy parks, the tree canopy cover in Norwich is estimated to be 18.6%

Urban trees are valued greatly by local communities, providing a broad range of benefits to people and the wider environment:

- Filter airborne dust and pollution.
- Improve local air quality.
- Sequestration of carbon
- Reduce temperature extremes.
- Reduce storm water runoff and the possibility of flooding.
- Increase biodiversity.

Using the Capital Asset Valuation of Amenity Trees methodology (CAVAT), the economic, social, and environmental benefits that the councils’ trees provide have been valued at just over three hundred million pounds.

With regards to recent bids to secure more trees in the city, we have been successful in securing £235,000 funding for new tree planting through the Urban Tree Challenge Fund (UTCf) and the Local Authority Treescapes Fund

(LATF) for the 4 years from 2023 – 2027. We have already planted 332 trees this year through these schemes, and plans are being developed for the next 3 years.”

Question 11

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

“The maintenance of our Council Tax Reduction Scheme as a clear mechanism from which we can better protect some of the most financially vulnerable constituents in Norwich is something all members of the council can be proud of. I was therefore concerned to read that the government intends in the 2024/25 financial to migrate all housing benefit claimants of working age, including mixed age couples, except those in temporary and exempt accommodation, to Universal Credit administered by the DWP. Given the importance of this policy, and the discretion allowed through it by elected councillors, can the cabinet member comment on his views as to whether he welcomes this change?”

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

“This Labour-led city council is rightly proud to continue to support our residents by retaining a 100% Council Tax Reduction Scheme (CTRS).

It is disappointing that the migration of all the remaining legacy Housing Benefit claimants of working age, including mixed age couples, to Universal Credit in the 2024/25 financial year will reduce the level of discretion we have to support these claimants through our CTRS Scheme from 2025/26 onwards.

The Applicable Amount for CTRS claimants in receipt of Universal Credit is the UC Maximum Award, rather than the level of Applicable Amount set by the City Council. Upon migration we lose the discretion in relation to these claimants to, for the purpose of calculating income, fully disregard housing costs and ignore the two-child benefits cap as we currently do with legacy HB claimants applying for CTRS.

The Government intends to keep pensioners, with the exception of mixed-age couples, and those in temporary/exempt accommodation on Housing Benefit which we will continue to administer.

We are politically committed to retaining our 100% CTRS scheme for all claimants, and migration of legacy HB claimants to UC will not remove this ability. We are legally obliged to provide a 100% CTRS scheme for pensioners.”

Question 12

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

“In a gutter repair case reported back in November 2022, the council have failed to deliver the repair with about four separate work orders being raised, appointments missed left right and centre by NCSL or contractors and target dates for completion pushed further and further back while lots of money has been spent on inefficient communication back and forth, officer time wasted and the resident still left angry and disappointed. It is clear we need a housing repair reporting system where tenants can book in their own repair appointments to give residents certainty, to actually deliver their repair while saving the council time and money cutting out endless inefficient communication internally. I have been told we already have the capability but have chosen not to switch this on. Is this because the council does not believe NCSL is fit to handle the demand of a customer-led repairs reporting system?”

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

“I believe previously that you queried this and received a response from the executive director of housing and community safety. We've undertaken a thorough review, dedicating the past six months to developing an improvement plan for NCSL's service delivery. While the NEC system has appointment functionality, it's currently basic. Initial focus has been on refining core scheduling activities. This will overlay the NEC system, offering dynamic scheduling solutions, transparency, and customer choice. The rationale for not turning the functionality on is not related to NCSL being unable to handle demand it is related to a prioritised approach to improving the whole scheduling and customer experience.”

Question 13

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

“Following our decision as a council to take action against pre-payment meters last January, please update me on the actions we have taken to use all communications methods at our disposal (website, letter, tenancy agreement, tenant involvement panel, social media, Citizen magazine, local press, etc) to explain, inform and continue to underline to residents that they do not have to accept a prepayment meter; and offer assistance to those who wish to move to other forms of payment if appropriate; provide discretionary help to residents with pre-payment meters and what extra attempts we have made to ascertain which city council tenants have prepayment meters, especially those who might be at extra risk of being cut off, and monitor them to offer assistance, for example through housing officer and other support.”

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

“Norwich City Council remains committed to supporting residents struggling with the cost-of-living crisis and experiencing fuel poverty.

A core part of this is supporting residents at risk of being moved to prepayment meters by their supplier. To help residents understand their rights, the council has shared advice on social media and on our website's cost of living page, providing guidance to residents and highlighting the rules energy suppliers must follow. The link to these cost-of-living pages, which also detail other support that residents might be eligible for, has been signposted extensively in housing letters, Council Tax letters, Citizen magazine, and on social media.

Because tenants are able to change utility supplier and associated metering as they wish, we don't have data on who has a pre-payment meter.

However, the council continues to offer extensive support to residents experiencing financial difficulties, so tenants who do come to us experiencing issues with energy bills can get help.

The Household Support Fund has enabled us to offer additional discretionary support this year, and alongside this we have been educating recipients about the standing charges they face.

Specifically, if high utility bills are a reason for money issues, the council's Income Officers will have discussions with residents about pre-payment meters, but the nature of conversation and the desire to empower individuals means that residents won't be probed about whether or not they have a pre-payment meter. If further guidance is required, residents will be referred to the Budgeting Advice and Money Advice team who are able to provide more detailed support and guidance.

It's also important to note that improving the energy efficiency of our housing stock is crucial to alleviating fuel poverty. The council has delivered energy efficiency improvements to over 2000 properties in the past 5 years, most

notably installing external wall insulation on 41 of our least efficient homes. We have ambitious plans for the future, and are currently developing a bid for Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund Wave 2.2 to allow us to continue this important work.”

Question 14

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

“In September 2023, I asked a question about the role of residents and councillors in the future of City Hall. I was told that “at the heart of that plan will be stakeholder and resident engagement at an early stage to inform next steps.” Could I have an update on how this stakeholder and resident engagement is progressing”?

Councillor Kendrick, the cabinet member for resources' response:

“Thank you for your question about this Councillor Young.

We are working with Inner Circle Consulting to take forward this project and establish a strategic brief for future development of City Hall. The aim is to have the strategic brief for City Hall produced by summer 2024, a focussed engagement plan will sit alongside this and will ensure resident and stakeholder input to support the delivery of the project is achieved.

As Inner Circle have also been working on our new corporate plan, they are well placed to ensure that the extensive stakeholder and resident engagement received via workshops, panel discussions, focus groups, street outreach and online surveys undertaken on the corporate plan informs our exciting work on the future of City Hall.”

Question 15

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

“Digital billboards consume a huge amount of energy, leading to more carbon emissions; they increase light pollution, adversely affecting both wildlife and people’s health; they clutter our city visually and they can distract drivers, making our streets less safe. Bristol City Council recently adopted a new local plan that expands upon national regulations by setting out criteria against which an advertisement’s response to “amenity” and “public safety”, the two only considerations local planning authorities can take into account when assessing planning applications for new digital billboards, will need to be assessed. Campaigners are confident that the new criteria will make it harder for advertisers to build large, new, intrusive screens in Bristol. Will the Cabinet member commit to exploring opportunities for Norwich City Council to adopt similar criteria as part of the council’s Development Management Policies or planned Design Code at the earliest opportunity?”

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

“The policy that Bristol City Council have recently published for consultation as part of their Local Plan Review does indeed provide some helpful clarity but does not fundamentally alter the matters that a council can consider when determining advertisement applications, for example it does not make reference to the impact of illuminated adverts upon wildlife. Subject to the publication shortly of the expected national development management policies, the development management policies for Norwich will be reviewed and we will consider at this stage whether it would be legally possible to include a local policy on advertisements, and the extent of any such policies including whether environmental considerations can be included. Any changes to the Development Management policies will be required to undergo consultation as part of a Local Plan Review process.”

Question 16

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

“In October 2023, Homeless Link released guidance for local authorities to ensure that rough sleepers are given shelter under a Severe Weather Emergency Protocols (SWEPS) before temperatures dip below freezing, using the 'feels-like' temperature rather than actual temperature and taking into account rain, snow, wind chill, gales and weather warnings to ensure we can best prevent serious medical implications or death on our streets. It also says that shelter should be offered in occasions of extreme hot weather. Currently our SWEPS says that shelter will only be provided when three days of freezing temperatures are predicted, and does not include shelter during extreme heat. I was told this policy has recently been reviewed, but there is no mention of this on the updated SWEPS section of the council website. Why did this review not take into account of new guidance to save lives of rough sleepers on our streets?”

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

“The council’s website is clear that we follow the government guidance on supporting vulnerable people before and during cold weather as updated in September 2023.

The council, in collaboration with Pathways Norwich, homelessness services and our partners, actively engages in efforts to prevent and address rough sleeping, particularly during extreme weather conditions.

As per guidance, the decision-making process for SWEPS activations takes into account factors other than temperature alone, as set out in the daily Weather Health Alerts provided by the Met Office.

During the last 3 years Norwich has been in a fortunate position to have use of the winter night shelter available to anyone rough sleeping throughout the winter months in addition to any SWEPS activations.

In the event of a regional weather warning for severe heat, we have established a robust plan during hot weather, with additional support provided to vulnerable individuals. This includes the distribution of packs containing essential items and targeted outreach efforts by our rough sleeper teams and partners. Throughout the year, beds are available to people who have been sleeping rough on the street through the ‘somewhere safe to stay’ hub and the supported accommodation system.

As a council we remain committed to preventing harm and fatalities on the streets, and we continuously strive to develop and improve our services.”

Question 17

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

“In answer to a question at September 2023 full council, we were told that orders for fire doors had been raised and that doors would start to be installed in October. We were then told the programme was on hold. Then we were told that details of programme were being put together in early October and would be shared when the programme commences. This did not happen. We asked about this a second time at full council in November 2023, being told works would commence in February. Residents have been waiting up to five years for doors which meet fire safety regulations and this is unacceptable - people should feel safe in their homes. It is time for some honesty. Does the cabinet member have confidence that NCSL can reliably deliver this programme from February?”

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

“We have appointed a contractor from a specialist framework provider to undertake the installation works at Winchester and Normandie towers. Within these blocks we have undertaken various works to mitigate the risk, such as installing secondary fire alarms within dwellings, fire-stopping works in communal areas and repairs to doors where required. These works have to be undertaken by accredited companies and their installation tradespeople. We are undertaking pilot works in Winchester Tower in February to finalise the precise installation process and will then commence the programme of installations from March 2024. We will concurrently tender for the remaining programmed works with the intention of appointing a further 3-4 specialist contractors to accelerate the programme and complete the remaining replacements in the shortest possible timeframe.”

Question 18

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

“Councillors are often told damp and repair works have been completed and removed from the tracker, only to discover when checking with the tenant, that work has been partially completed, or in some cases not started. What evidence of completion is provided to assure councillors and residents that contractors are not being paid for work which has not been completed?”

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

“When works are completed by the contractor this is recorded on the council repairs system to confirm completion of the works. This includes the nature of the work carried out and when it was completed. Historically, follow up surveys were undertaken with a selection of customers to receive feedback.

As part of the recently completed property services restructure, we have introduced the role of “clerk of works” to strengthen our validation process. This role will carry out physical inspections of completed repairs on a sample basis. The sample will be dictated by the type of works and any identified trends.”

Question 19

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

“I was surprised to read on social media that the Reuse Centre at Swanton Road has recently closed due to unforeseen circumstances. The depot provided an accessible and convenient drop off point for items for reuse, diverting them from landfill and recycling. Since the recycling centre was closed and there was no longer a facility within city council boundaries, this provided an alternative. It provided training opportunities, supported community groups such as Mile X, and hosted pop up sales. It won an industry award and was unique in many aspects. On site visits, Councillor Stutely and I were impressed by the vision and creativity of the Benjamin Foundation staff and could see how their work would meet many of the council’s objectives (environmental, community cohesion). As the owner of the building what steps did the council take to ensure the survival of this important service?”

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

“The Benjamin Foundation have been providing an excellent facility at Swanton Road and it is unfortunate that it has closed. The premises was let to the Benjamin Foundation by a previous tenant whose lease ended in January. The council had been in discussions with the Benjamin Foundation about continuing the facility and had offered a new lease at a peppercorn rent whilst the future of the property was considered further. Unfortunately, despite this offer, the Benjamin Foundation wrote to us in December advising that they would not be able to continue to run the facility and that sadly they had made the decision to close the premises. I understand that the Benjamin Foundation have looked at alternative ways of running their furniture refurbishment operations to enable them to continue their good work.”

Question 20

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

“In 2019 I identified that taxi and private hire vehicle (PHV) enforcement was inadequate and repeatedly asked officers and colleagues for additional resources, but adequate permanent funding has never materialised. I also asked for parking enforcement to keep taxi ranks clear but that isn’t happening either. Of particular concern is the ongoing failure to control late night PHVs and Hackneys in Prince of Wales Road. There are reports of PHV abuses, while the taxi rank is frequently unusable due to other vehicles (including PHVs) illegally parking. The result is chaotic with frustrated visitors remaining the area for much longer than necessary. There is potential for disorder, but also vulnerable young people are unable to get home safely. Could the cabinet member comment on whether he believes that sufficient levels of enforcement action have taken place, especially in the month of December, including confirmation of permanently funded officers to help address issues?”

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

“With regards to parking enforcement, we have increased enforcement activity in the Prince of Wales Road area over the last 6 months. For example, 37 hours of late night patrols were carried out at weekends in December aimed at improving traffic flow, addressing unsafe parking, and providing reassurance for visitors and residents in the area. This included taxi rank enforcement, where the presence of Civil Enforcement Officers acted as a deterrent against unauthorised use.

In addition, following receipt of complaints, we are investigating licensed vehicles and checking operator records to establish whether they were pre-booked. This includes sharing information with neighbouring licensing authorities on their licensed vehicles. Private hire vehicles are permitted to wait for their pre-booked journeys in a location where they are lawfully entitled to wait or park. Any licensing contraventions are reported to home licensing authorities as appropriate, and we have frequent contact with our licensing counterparts at Broadland and South Norfolk particularly.

I will work with officers to drive efficiencies in the service and look at strategies to build capacity in order to increase effective enforcement activities.”

Question 21

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

“The housing department does not record data for non-qualification to the housing register. What is the reason for data not being collected, anonymised and used to inform the financial inclusion consortium of the reasons residents may be seeking support, so they can plan accordingly?”

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

“GDPR guidance states that organisations must not keep personal data for longer than it is needed. Once a determination is made our need for the information ends.

This question suggests that qualification for the Home Options scheme is affected by affordability or finance, which is not the case. Affordability for example is not an issue that would affect the allocation of council housing, although we acknowledge that some housing associations undertake affordability checks prior to allocation. We are happy to work with the housing financial inclusion consortium if they require any information regarding the operation of the housing register.”

Question 22

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

“Rechargeable fees are when tenants pay the council back for work it has done. Please could you outline what the levels of rechargeable fees recovered have been over past five years as a percentage of the total, year by year?”

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

“Over the past four years a total of £576,103 has been recharged in fees to former and current tenants for work that has been carried out by the council’s contractors. To date we have recovered approximately 28% of these costs.

As part of the Council’s debt recovery strategy, workstreams and guidance are being prepared to significantly improve the rate of income recovery.”

Question 23

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

“Residents are regularly reporting that communal bins are not being collected on time even when residents report the issue to the council. Rubbish accumulates making the area look unsightly and can attract vermin. Sadly, this seems to be a growing problem in recent months with missed collections being reported in the Oak Street area, Rouen Road area and Duke Street. Can the cabinet member reassure residents by telling me what actions are being taken to stop the problem getting worse?”

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

“The collection issues at the locations identified by Councillor Schmierer were caused by changes to access arrangements introduced by the property managers, particularly changes to locks and electronic key fobs. In these cases, we are reliant on the property managers advising the council promptly of any changes that are made, and providing us with new keys and fobs to allow us to access the bin storage areas.

Where we are made aware that collections are missed, either via Biffa, residents or elected members, we liaise with property managers and Biffa, our collection contractor, to ensure that we can gain access as quickly as possible to empty the communal bins and remove any excess waste that has accumulated.”

Question 24

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

“Many communal bin areas are eventually cleared of fly tipping if a request is put in, but the area is left filthy with detritus all over the ground. Is the cabinet member satisfied with the service we are providing?”

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

“Unfortunately, fly tipping is an issue across the city and affects different categories of locations, including communal bin areas. In the calendar year 2023, over 80% of incidents were cleared with 24 hours of reporting.

Responsibility for clearing fly tipping is dependent on site ownership. On land owned by the council, NCSL is responsible for clearing fly tipping. They offer a highly responsive service in difficult circumstances, and we are not aware of any concerns about the quality of service delivery

On sites that are owned either by registered social landlords or are privately owned, responsibility for clearing fly tipping lies with the owner. The council has no responsibility for this, but would provide advice where requested”

Question 25

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

“How many council properties are awaiting repairs that are currently overdue for completion by Norwich City Services Limited?”

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

“Norwich City Services Limited (NCSL) have experienced an increase in reported and raised repairs, from a historic annual volume of circa 26,000 to an increased projected volume of circa 36,000. This is in line with the wider repairs industry as identified by Housemark. This increase in the volume of works has translated into an increase in works identified as being out of target, with other organisations experiencing the same challenges.

In July 2023 following the appointment of additional skills and expertise to the NCSL Board and management team, work commenced to improve repairs scheduling processes, repairs reporting methodology and productivity.

As of 23 January, there are 3195 properties awaiting a repair, there are no emergencies identified in this figure and this ranges across all repairs categories.”

Question 26

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

“On a number of occasions, colleagues and I have made verbal agreements with cabinet members to meet, to discuss the issues that arise in our wards, but have later found that the meetings don’t happen. Email responses can take a long time to get a response to, and while I can appreciate that cabinet members have busy schedules, sometimes emails appear to be overlooked entirely. Do cabinet members agree that when a course of action, such as meeting with a councillor, or emailing over some information, is verbally agreed in a public meeting, those actions should be carried out?”

Councillor Stonard, the leader's response:

“As a general rule I would agree that meetings with cabinet members which are agreed should take place although, due to high workloads and competing priorities, expectations of timescales for holding such meetings might not always be possible to meet. There may also be occasions where a meeting with a cabinet member is requested but it is deemed more appropriate for the member to meet with an officer or to be sent written information, or both. If there are any specific examples of problems with meetings I would be pleased to receive them and look into them.”

Question 27

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

“A resident on Bull Close reported a leaking roof on 6 February 2023. On 7 February she was told the roof was included in the re-roofing programme for 2022/23. In March 2023 a surveyor visited and confirmed there was a leak, and said he would report to the council. In May, having heard nothing, the resident contacted the council to ask what was happening and was told that the repair was now scheduled for 2023/24. In September, the resident contacted the council again, and two operatives visited the next day – but had been sent to the wrong flat. The resident was then told that the repair was scheduled for 2024/25. In October, scaffolding was put up and then removed again without repairing the leak. Can the cabinet member confirm what process is in place to ensure that repairs scheduled for 2022/23 do not get delayed by at least two years?”

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

“I am not sure how long you have been aware of this case, but you will appreciate that without a specific address I am unable to provide you with an answer this evening. If you provide me with the details outside the meeting, I will ensure you receive a full update from officers.

I believe that you may be referring to a planned programme of work rather than a responsive repair, but again that is not clear from your question.

All planned programmes are based on component lifecycle. in this case - roofs. The year before a roof programme is due, inspections are carried out to evaluate condition. If the condition remains good the lifecycle may be extended. All planned programmes are subject to this approach.

You will be aware that we have commissioned a 100% stock conditions survey which is due for completion this year. This will provide property services teams with improved data when planning programmes of work.”

Question 28

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

“Residents are reporting wheelie bins being left out on the pavement and in public alleyways to the council on a regular basis, as it presents both health and access problems for them. An FOI request by a resident revealed that there had been no enforcement actions taken in the last year. I raised this issue with a question to full council in June of last year, when I was told that the council prefers to use a 'light touch'. Clearly the 'light touch' is not working, and residents are feeling frustrated and ignored by the council. Can the cabinet member comment on whether they have confidence in their 'light touch' approach to enforce the bylaw regarding wheelie bins, under section 46a of the Environmental Protection Act 1990?”

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

“As Councillor Francis is aware, we investigate all reports of bins obstructing footways, and engage with residents to ensure that pavements are kept clear. Any action that is taken needs to be proportionate taking into account the seriousness of the incidents being reported, and the resources available to deal with them.

We have taken advice on the effectiveness of issuing notices under S46a of the Environmental Protection Act 1990, and this this enforcement route is regarded as ineffective in addressing the problem on bins left out before and after collection. We therefore believe that, in the circumstances, the informal approach we currently take is the most effective in dealing with this problem”

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

Question 29

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

“Norwich has fifteen community centres owned by the city council and operated by organisations within their own right, only one of which has renewable energy. This saves significantly on its previously high energy bill as a result. The council does not hold information on the energy bills for these buildings which are paid by the communities they serve. To save centres money and help them provide services for their communities and to cut carbon, will the cabinet member commit to making sure these costs are collected and analysed?”

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

“Renewable energy has positive environmental and financial impacts, and I am pleased to hear that the investment in solar panels made by Marlpit Community Centre is having such a significant impact on its energy bills. This in turn helps the charity keep their hire rates down, making the community centre more affordable for the residents it serves.

As you rightly say, each community centre is operated by an organisation in their own right, and we are very grateful for the huge numbers of residents who volunteer their time to run these buildings, delivering such a valuable service to the community.

As these are independent organisations we cannot oblige community centres to provide these details and I am mindful about placing an additional burden on volunteers. However, as part of our ongoing support to community centres, I am happy to offer that if the community centres send us their energy costs, we would be able to look at these and share an analysis back with a view to identifying money and carbon saving opportunities.”