



MINUTES

COUNCIL

7.30pm to 8.40pm

25 September 2012

Present: Councillors Gayton (Lord Mayor), Councillors Ackroyd, Arthur, Barker, Blunt, Bradford, Bremner, Brimblecombe, Brociek-Coulton, Carlo, Driver, Galvin, Gee, Gihawi, Grahame, Grenville, Harris, Haynes, Henderson, Howard, Kendrick, Lay, Little, Lubbock, MacDonald, Manning, Price, Rogers, Sands (M), Sands (S), Stephenson, Stonnard, Storie, Thomas and Waters

Apologies: John Jennings (Sheriff) and Councillors Button, Neale, Stammers and Wright.

1. LORD MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Lord Mayor said that since the last meeting he had opened the new YMCA café at the bus station site and attended the opening of the new YMCA building on Bethel Street.

He had attended the 'Toys and Tins' music concert in St. Andrews Hall organised by the Norwich Salvation Army as part of the programme of collection of food and toys for those in need at Christmas.

The Battle of Britain parade was held at the beginning of Battle of Britain week and the commemoration service had been held at the cathedral; on both occasions there had been a fly past by a spitfire aircraft. He had also presented signed oaths to young army recruits who had pledged their allegiance at a ceremony at city hall.

At the invitation of the Lord Mayor, Councillor Brociek-Coulton informed council of that Norwich in Bloom had achieved the following awards at the Anglia in Bloom competition: Biodiversity Award; Community Project; Public Space; Most Improved Area; City Route and Urban Communities Project.

The city had been awarded the cities' gold award and this was presented to the Lord Mayor by Bill Webster and Reg Chittock, representing Norwich in Bloom.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

3. QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

The Lord Mayor said that a public question had been received in advance of the meeting.

County Councillor Richard Edwards to the cabinet member for housing:

“When the city council gives planning permission to builders of new homes to build

+those new homes on brownfield sites, and also to pull down old garages and temporarily remove fixed things in the way of building these new homes, ie a community poster board, they are expected to put in back up undamaged or replace it with a new one.

So when is this city council going to force the company that built the new homes on the corner of Berners Street and Junction Road to put back one of the Mile Cross estate’s community boards that was on Junction Road which was removed when building the new homes? If it can’t be put in the same place then please could you get them to put it up across the road, and if it is damaged, force them to replace it with a new one?”

Councillor MacDonald, cabinet member for housing, replied:

“Thank you County Councillor Edwards for bringing this matter to my attention.

I can confirm that the contractor responsible for the removal of the community notice board during the development of six new affordable homes has apologised for the delay in re-providing this facility and will be providing a new notice board.

The contractor had taken delivery of the notice board and is currently in discussions with officers to determine the most appropriate location for this to be fixed.

I will ensure that all interested parties are notified once this has been completed.”

In reply to a supplementary question from County Councillor Edwards, Councillor MacDonald said that the contractor had apologised for the delay and had committed to replacing the community notice board as soon as possible.

4. PETITIONS

There were no petitions.

5. MINUTES

RESOLVED to approve the minutes of the meetings held on 17 July and 25 July 2012.

6. QUESTIONS TO CABINET MEMBERS AND COMMITTEE CHAIRS

The Lord Mayor advised that nine 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:

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| Question 1 | Councillor Howard to the cabinet member for resources on government plans to withdraw housing benefit from under 25s. |
| Question 2 | Councillor Little to the cabinet member for environment and neighbourhoods on waste collection bins. |
| Question 3 | Councillor Galvin to the cabinet member for resources on open data. |
| Question 4 | Councillor Carlo to the cabinet member for environment and neighbourhoods on blocked drains and street cleaning. |
| Question 5 | Councillor Stonard to the cabinet member for resources on influencing apprenticeships. |
| Question 6 | Councillor Thomas to the cabinet member for environment and development on planning changes. |
| Question 7 | Councillor Ackroyd to the cabinet member for environment and development on collective energy switching. |
| Question 8 | Councillor Lubbock to the cabinet member for housing on tenant engagement and scrutiny. |
| Question 9 | Councillor Grenville to the leader of the council on regulation of private renting sector housing. |

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

7. ANNUAL REPORT OF THE MONITORING OFFICER

Councillor Waters moved and Councillor Brociek-Coulton seconded the recommendations in the report.

RESOLVED, unanimously, to receive the annual report of the monitoring officer.

8. APPOINTMENT TO THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Councillor Waters moved and Councillor Gihawi seconded, the recommendation in the report.

RESOLVED, unanimously, to appoint Mr Alistair Roy to the position of independent person for the purposes of the Localism Act 2011.

9. MOTION – LOCALISM OF COUNCIL TAX

Councillor Waters moved and Councillor Kendrick seconded, the motion as set out on the agenda.

RESOLVED, unanimously, to call on the MPs for Norwich north and Norwich south to make representations to the government to withdraw its proposals for the Localism of council tax benefit and to retain a fully funded national scheme.

LORD MAYOR

APPENDIX A

QUESTIONS TO CABINET MEMBERS AND COMMITTEE CHAIRS

Question 1

Councillor Lucy Howard to the cabinet member for resources:-

“Nationally, around 385,000 young people would be affected by the government proposal to withdraw housing benefit from those under 25, a projected cut of £2 billion. This figure includes around 200,000 people who have children and many people who are in work but need housing benefit to bring their income up to something approximating a living wage. The bright idea seems to be that young people will be taken in by their families, but in many cases families may not be able or willing to provide housing.

An example of one of the expected impacts is upon the YMCA, all of whose centres in Norwich fall within my ward. Across Norfolk the organisation has around 240 bed spaces. Funding comes from a variety of sources, but the ability of the YMCA to house vulnerable young people under 25 depends largely on its ability to claim housing benefit on their behalf. Although the Prime Minister has stated that 'those who genuinely have nowhere else to live' and those who are victims of domestic violence may qualify as exceptions, this vague statement fails to take into account the complexity of circumstances in which young people may find themselves. A loss of funding on the scale proposed by the government would result in a youth homelessness crisis across the city. Surely, rather than waiting patiently for the inevitable to happen, the council needs to pre-empt this potentially devastating spending cut and send a strong message to the government that such proposals are unjustified and unacceptable. Is the council willing to put pressure on the government to rethink its proposal?”

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

“I would like to thank Councillor Howard for her topical question and to assure her that we are doing all we can to challenge the Coalition Government's short sighted and very damaging cuts to welfare provision; including the deep cuts in support for young people. The right to social security, particularly during an economic recession, is a measure of a civilised society; the government's policies have moved resolutely in the opposite direction. A detailed account of the Labour administration's position is laid out in the 'Financial inclusion strategy 2012 – 2015' which went to cabinet earlier this month.

At a practical level, the council has also taken its responsibility very seriously to highlight and where possible, mitigate against the worst aspects of the welfare reform changes. Last December the council hosted a workshop for partners and agencies to inform them and share information on the challenges faced by all vulnerable groups including young people.

One of the keynote speakers was Baroness Patricia Hollis who was very active challenging the bill and championing the concerns of this administration in the House of Lords when the Welfare Reform Bill was being considered.

The Mancroft Advice Project also participated in this workshop and very clearly described the impending prospects for young people in the city in low paid work or benefits following the changes brought and will be brought about by the welfare reform act.

In relation to the cuts that we are already aware of, officers are already working with partners in the voluntary sector and the other social landlords to help where we can. For example for social housing tenants, many of whom are under 25 years of age, we are advising them at the point of them bidding for new homes of the implications of the proposed changes to welfare benefits and with both new and existing tenants, helping them to manage their finances as efficiently as possible – no mean feat given the paltry nature of the level of benefits under 25's receive and increasing living costs for food, utilities and travel.

In addition the city council is currently consulting on the proposed schemes to replace the current Council Tax Benefit scheme, including the council not implement the 10% cut imposed by the government which would have undoubtedly have very serious impacts on all vulnerable groups in the city but particularly to those under 25.

Finally officers from a number of service areas are continuing to work through how the council can help and support vulnerable people to deal with these government imposed cuts to their benefits. There is also on-going work with other social landlords and other stakeholders to share information and best practice.

This administration has and will continue to raise concerns with government about this poorly thought out piece of legislation and I hope council can show that it supports the approach taken."

Councillor Howard asked, as a supplementary question, if the cabinet member could be more specific on how he will raise these concerns with government.

Councillor Waters said that his earlier reply demonstrated how the council was taking every opportunity to raise concerns including with local MPs, feedback to government and the LGA. The council had done a lot of work not only on this issue but on the full range of welfare reform cuts, particularly looking at the impact of all of these on all demographic groups and on the local economy. Everyone on the council could collectively turn around the perception that suggested people were comfortable with these cuts to show the government that these changes were short sighted, lacked humanity, and that its direction needed to change.

Question 2

Councillor Stephen Little to the cabinet member for environment and neighbourhoods:-

"What more could the council do to encourage waste collection teams to return bins to the correct and appropriate place after collection?"

Councillor Keith Driver, cabinet member for environment and neighbourhoods' reply:-

"Officers are working with our contractor to ensure the collection crews return bins after collection from where it was picked up. This has been raised in our discussions at the contract strategic board and assurances have been given by our contractor

that they will ensure bins are returned. Our contract officers are monitoring the rounds and where they find bins not being returned they raise the issue with our contractor. I would ask members to report any such occurrences through councillor enquiries at the time of occurrence so appropriate action can be taken.”

Councillor Little asked, as a supplementary question, whether the checks will be proactive or reactive and does the service level agreement give opportunity to penalise the contractor if complaints are too high. **Councillor Driver** emphasised that the contract required the contractor to return the bins to where they came from. If they did not then residents should report this to council and the contractor would be required to address this if necessary. He would speak to officers to ascertain the position regarding the service level agreement.

Question 3

Councillor Lucy Galvin to the cabinet member for resources:-

“In June, the council resolved ‘to ask the cabinet to review how more data about the council and the city collected by the council can be made public, with the aim of embracing the open data concept as fully as is practical’.

How is this review progressing?”

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

“Councillor Galvin will be aware that we routinely publish performance reports as well as items of spending over £500. The government has recently indicated that this should now happen for all items if spending over £250 and this is something we will work towards. We also make available online summaries of our non housing assets, key statistics about the city and its electoral wards and a monthly economic barometer (shared with key business partners) to give residents, developers and visitors an understanding of both the variety of life in Norwich and also the acute levels of deprivation some of our residents face. A significant amount of data is also published as part of council committee meetings.

However we also need to understand that simply publishing information without context or background may not adequately inform debate or understanding. The way league tables are used in, for example, health or education illustrate the case that data on its own can be misunderstood or manipulated. Whilst I welcome our continued publication of information I am mindful of the need to balance that with the resources required to make such publication meaningful and useful.

If there are specific items of data that you believe are not being published that would be helpful I would be happy to receive suggestions from you.”

Councillor Galvin said that the reply suggested that the review was not progressing. She asked, as a supplementary question, if the cabinet member would look at councils like Redbridge to consider publicising the same environmental data sets that it does. **Councillor Waters** said he would look at these and make a judgement as to what was appropriate to put in the public domain.

Question 4

Councillor Denise Carlo to the cabinet member for environment and neighbourhoods:-

“Residents regularly and repeatedly raise concerns about blocked street drains and the necessity of cleaning gutters to reduce the problem. In September 2011, in response to a public question, the cabinet gave a commitment to publish the street cleaning timetable online "where possible", giving dates on which residents are asked to move their vehicles to allow access to the gutters for cleansing.

In addition, the council has said that it will develop a strategy for dealing with the systemic problem of blocked drains across the city.

What progress has been made on these two interrelated issues?”

Councillor Keith Driver, cabinet member for environment and neighbourhoods’ reply:-

“The street cleansing schedule has recently been updated to ensure all adopted highways and paths are included. It is currently with our contractor for them to verify and update their work programme. This should be completed by the end of October. Once it is has been verified it will be published on our website.

Turning to gulley emptying and 'deep cleans' an improved approach was piloted last autumn. As Councillor Carlo implies, parked vehicles can obstruct such work, particularly in the terraced street areas. A trial was carried out of writing to local residents living in the terraced streets off Earlam Road advising them of impending work and asking them to move their cars to a neighbouring street accordingly.

I am pleased to say this initiative was successful with a very high level of cooperation from the public. Whilst not every parked car was moved it was nonetheless possible to clean out the vast majority of gulleys. Earlier in the summer there were some instances of exceptionally heavy rain and neither the council nor Anglian Water received any reports of surface water flooding in these areas. Given the apparent success of the trial, such an approach is planned for later this autumn and in subsequent years.

In undertaking the gulley cleaning described above a number additional problems were found including, for example, blocked connections and jammed lids. Such problems have been found by the contractor at other sites as well and more than would be expected for a well maintained system.

The contractor commenced in April 2010 and anecdotally the amount of additional work such as clearing blocked connections is reducing. Also the level of expenditure required to undertake the same level of gulley cleans is reducing. Both of these suggest that the level of additional work has reduced consistent with a well maintained asset. Officers will be asking the contractor to provide management information so that this can be verified.”

Councillor Carlo asked, as a supplementary question, whether the monitoring of gullies was part of the contract. **Councillor Driver** emphasised that the main problem was caused by parked cars making it difficult for contractors to see where

drains were blocked. He hoped that publicising street cleaning schedules would help reduce this problem.

Question 5

Councillor Mike Stonard to the cabinet member for resources:-

"I understand the council is doing its best to use its spending power with contacts to influence apprenticeships, and encourage the long term unemployed back into work.

Are there any examples that can be given to illustrate how this is being implemented?"

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

"Young people and the long term unemployed face a very challenging future in their efforts to obtain employment. The council is committed to doing all that we can to help address this inequality at a time when economic confidence is low. In this context one of the key actions taken by the council is, where practicable, to include a requirement in new works contracts for suppliers to provide 10% of the workforce for from the "Building Futures" project. This is a joint partnership initiative that was started by the council and Homes and Communities Agency.

The 10% figure will either be a target or act as a minimum acceptable level. It does depend on the TUPE rights of staff from the outgoing supplier and also the complexity and specialism of the new contract where, perhaps, only highly trained and skilled staff are able to deliver that requirement.

However, we are achieving some very notable successes. For instance the recent award of the housing external redecoration contract (referred to in the question) is an excellent example of this working in practice. The contract requirement was for 10% of the workforce to be appointed from the "Building Futures" project but the successful supplier has committed to appoint a minimum of 80% of the workforce from this scheme. In addition the housing upgrades and improvements supplier, Foster Property Maintenance Ltd, are in the process of appointing three apprentices on the back of the award of the council's contract with a view to repeating this in future years depending on contract volumes. The council is in discussion with Norse Commercial Services, successful supplier for the new housing responsive maintenance, about the number of apprentices this contract can support and how these can best be appointed.

The "Building Futures" project is working with the Norfolk Construction Forum to deliver a genuine, fully comprehensive one stop shop for information, guidance, training and recruitment for small, medium and large construction employers.

The project provides work-ready candidates and the ability for employers to source local candidates with the right skills quickly and easily. A comprehensive and flexible range of training is available to fully meet the needs of employers across the full range of skills and trades and the project offers a full range of apprenticeships. 70 apprenticeships have been directly created by the project to date.

As well as our suppliers the council itself is looking to introduce apprenticeships and trainee posts within its structures. Three trainee posts are included within the new structure for property services (these posts currently being advertised) and two

apprentice premises manager posts to be introduced shortly. Combined it is clear that small steps across a range of activities can have a significant local impact. I am keen that we continue to look at how the council can not only continue to deliver cost effective and quality services but also achieve wider social and economic benefits by providing work to local people."

In reply to a supplementary question from **Councillor Stonard, Councillor Waters** said he welcomed initiatives such as the commitment to offering young people work and apprenticeships made by a contractor as a recent meeting of the Catton Grove Residents Association. He hoped other contractors could be encouraged to do the same.

Question 6

Councillor Viv Thomas to the cabinet member for environment and development:-

"Can the cabinet member give his view on the proposed changes to planning rules which will see the rules on extensions relaxed?"

Councillor Bert Bremner, cabinet member for member for environment and development's reply:-

"Thank you very much for the question. As Councillor Thomas may be aware the government's intentions to relax planning rules in relation to house extensions was one of a package of measures that was announced in a parliamentary written statement on 6 September 2012. I am aware this has generated a fair degree of press coverage and I will express a view on this aspect of the proposals in a moment. However, I think it is important that the concern we may have about the impact of this aspect of the proposals does not detract from other aspects of what is proposed which potentially could have far more serious implications for Norwich.

I am aware that those of us on Sustainable Development Panel will get a chance to debate this matter further tomorrow but there are two issues about the government's recent proposals for reform of planning system which give rise to particular concerns.

Firstly the announcement on 6 September included a proposal to allow the change of use from commercial to residential purposes without the need for planning permission. This possible measure was consulted on last year and the city council and many others had objected strongly. Only as recently July the government announced it was not intending to pursue this idea. Hardly surprising when only 12% of those responding to the previous consultation had favoured it and they had only just published the new National Planning Policy Framework which strongly encourages authorities to grant permission for such development.

In its response to the previous consultation the city council had objected strongly to this proposal drawing attention to the potential economic, environmental and transportation impacts that the change would bring about. This change would also result in conversion being able to be carried out without any consideration of whether any proportion of the new units created would be affordable or whether there is a need for any other infrastructure improvement to serve the development. This would create an uneven market where the building of new housing schemes was at a commercial disadvantage to housing created in converted buildings. Potentially this

could further undermine efforts to bring about the redevelopment of under used and derelict sites across the city, especially in the city centre and undermine our efforts to encourage the provision of higher quality office stock in the city centre.

One think of light in the consultation is that the government has indicated that there will be an opportunity for local authorities to seek an exemption where they believe there will be an adverse economic impact. If the government does push ahead with this measure I will ask officers to ensure that seek to take advantage of any exemptions that may be available.

We can and do support the conversion of vacant office stock to create new homes, and the recent planning approval issued for Westlegate Tower is a good example of this, but it is important that this is adequately controlled to protect employment in the city centre, ensure new homes are of a decent standard with the right supporting infrastructure and confidence in the market is not undermined.

The second aspect of particular concern is the combined effect on the changes on the ability to provide for new mixed developments which promote social cohesion even though this remains an objective of government housing policy. Gradually the government are making it easier for private sector developers to bring forward development with little or no provision for affordable in their schemes, the impact of this is exacerbated by the government's funding regime for affordable housing which basically directs what support there is for the provision of affordable housing away from private sector led schemes. If this funding regime were different affordable housing could more easily be integrated into larger private led developments and may even be able to be used to pump prime some development. However, as things stand the government policy is encouraging the mistakes of the past to be repeated where there may be a stark division between publically supported and private housing schemes.

Turning back to the question and the proposals to extend permitted development rights on houses I will be very interested to see the reaction of middle England to these proposals. I doubt that whoever came up with this proposal genuinely appreciates the extent of change that is allowed to houses without the need for planning permission at present. Nor the harm that can be caused to people's enjoyment of their own properties by the measures proposed. We have yet to see the detail of the proposals yet so can't judge the impact fully but it would appear that the government are proposing to allow extensions for a temporary period that may currently be refused planning permission due to the harm they would cause to the enjoyment of neighbouring properties. Allowing a temporary relaxation of the rules to allow harmful permanent development is bizarre.

Overall I get the impression that the government is deeply torn about the planning system. On one hand it is stressing the importance of putting local people in control while on the other hand proposing amendments to the planning system removing any ability to control development that will have significant impacts on individuals and communities. More worrying the lack of a clear direction and frequent reversals of announcement are creating an air of uncertainty when it hard to predict where permission is or is not needed and what will or will not be acceptable. This does nothing to help us provide the market with certainty and kick start the development industry to help stimulate the economy and provide the new homes and jobs we so desperately need."

Question 7

Councillor Caroline Ackroyd to the cabinet member for environment and development:-

"I was pleased to see that at cabinet on 12 September it was agreed to establish a collective energy switching scheme for the city, something the Liberal Democrat Group is in full support of.

Research about switching elsewhere in the country suggests that one of the groups of people least likely to switch are older people, many of whom also do not benefit from discounts available such as direct debit payment.

Could the cabinet member give an assurance that the specialist switching partner will be required to work closely with organisations in the city that support older people, in order to ensure that participation by them in this scheme is maximised."

Councillor Bert Bremner, cabinet member for environment and development's reply:-

"I am delighted that the Liberal Democrat Group is in full support of the collective energy switching scheme, which will hopefully allow many Norwich citizens to save money on their utility bills. In doing this I recognise that it is important we try and make the scheme as inclusive as possible.

We are currently drafting our collective switching communications strategy with our switching provider. As part of our procurement process we asked how "hard to reach" citizens would be approached. We therefore hope that our project will be as inclusive as possible. Research from other similar schemes indicate that it is possible to engage with older people and people who are not on the inter-net via road shows and other "face to face" engagement methods. The research has also indicated that people can benefit from collective switching regardless of their preferred payment method.

Finally the switching provider will also offer training to officers to allow support via our customer contact centre. In addition the council hopes to work with organisations such as the Citizen Advice Bureau and Age UK."

Question 8

Councillor Judith Lubbock to the cabinet member for housing:-

"At a recent scrutiny meeting we received a presentation on Tenant Scrutiny and the New Regulatory Framework for Tenant Engagement; this now being the process through which to scrutinise the council's housing stock and its maintenance and management.

Whilst I feel that tenants should be at the forefront of scrutiny I also believe that councillors need to be more involved with our housing services.

I would like to suggest that a sub committee comprising approximately four councillors volunteer themselves to work through the 'Tenant training programme' - working alongside tenants to build up an expertise in housing that is currently lacking

in councillors. With the agreement of tenants they could then continue to work together in a collaborative way, ensuring continued councillor involvement with the scrutiny of the council's social housing.

Would the cabinet member for housing support such a proposal and the formation of a sub committee?"

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

"At the September meeting of the scrutiny committee, the head of housing and the chair of the Norwich Tenants CityWide Board gave a joint presentation to members that outlined the new social housing regulation for tenant engagement and scrutiny. This covered both the tenants' side and the council scrutiny role.

The member role is distinct from that of the tenants. Councillors take more of an overview role where as the tenants, as those who received the service, are best placed to take a judgement over the quality of the service being delivered.

Members do have the opportunity to monitor the housing service through performance monitoring data and policy overview and pre scrutiny role which has always been the case

The direct involvement of tenants is an obvious strength of the new arrangements and I appreciate that Councillor Lubbock also recognises this.

Based on their consideration of this matter, the scrutiny committee resolved to recommend that the:

- (a) Participation of tenants be welcomed
- (b) Council be encouraged to promote; common standards between housing associations and the council that promote best practice for involvement of and outcomes for tenants
- (c) Council continuously shares learning and comparison with other authorities
- (d) While working as an independent entity, tenant scrutiny be made aware that they are able to contact and liaise with the council scrutiny committee if necessary
- (e) Scrutiny committee of the council carry out its role by;
 - (i) Performance monitoring;
 - (ii) receiving the annual report and that this be presented by the tenant reps; and
 - (iii) receiving the annual review.

In addition as the housing portfolio holder, I do host a regular meeting for shadow portfolio holders. These meetings provide an opportunity for lead group members on housing to discuss and explore matters in detail. There is an open invitation for a member of the Liberal Democrat Group to join these meetings. Therefore, it is clear that combined all of the above provides a very robust framework for assessing the

housing service and I do not consider that a sub-committee would add any additional value.”

Question 9

Councillor Sarah Grenville to the leader of the council:

“At council on 17 July 2012, cabinet was asked to support a petition asking housing minister, Right Honourable Grant Shapps MP, to "undertake an urgent review and update of UK housing legislation to provide protection worthy of a 21st century developed nation, to tenants in the private rental sector". I understand Councillor Arthur had already written a letter to him along those lines before that meeting. Has Councillor Arthur received a response to her letter?”

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

“I have received a reply to my letter – it wasn’t directly from Grant Shapps as he got a Liberal Democrat MP to reply on his behalf. The letter is as follows:

‘Dear Councillor Arthur

Thank you for your letter of 11 July, about regeneration of the private rented sector, and its current legislation.

I am sorry to hear about the difficulties being experienced by many of your constituents. The ability for landlords to gain possession of their properties on a ‘no fault’ basis was introduced by the Housing Act 1988, which also established assured and assured shorthold tenancies as the main forms of tenancy. Before these tenancies, the private rental market was in decline. Regulated rents and lifetime tenancies meant that being a landlord was simply not commercially viable for many property owners, and supply decreased. However, since 1988, the private rented sector has grown steadily and has responded flexibly to changes in the wider housing market, growing from just over 9% of the market in 1988 to approximately 16.5% today. I would also add that there is no record that the previous administration ever had any plans to change the legislation covering assured shorthold tenancies.

There is little evidence that the ability to gain possession has led to evictions by landlords being widespread. Statistics from for the English Housing Survey show that in over 90% of cases, tenancies are ended by the tenant, not the landlord. If we make it more difficult to rent, landlords would be reluctant to let their properties, leading to less accommodation being available for rent, which would not help landlords or tenants.

Andrew Stunell MP’

This was not the response I had hoped for, so we will have to continue to campaign and lobby on behalf of the private tenants of Norwich.”