



NORWICH City Council

COUNCIL

29 September 2009

Questions to Executive Members and Committee Chairs

Question 1

Councillor Rosalind Wright to the Executive Member for Sustainable City Development:-

"In view of the current 10:10 carbon reduction campaign, supported by a number of councils and other organisations, could the Executive Member please inform Council of the measures being taken to achieve the Council's own carbon reduction target for 2010?"

Councillor Brenda Arthur on behalf of Councillor Brian Morrey, Executive Member for Sustainable City Development's reply:-

"In October 2008 Norwich City Council agreed its second environmental strategy which sets out the actions we are taking to improve our environmental performance, as well as the steps we are taking to encourage other organisations and individuals across the city to improve theirs.

This strategy included a commitment to reduce the city council's carbon footprint by 30 per cent over the next five year period.

I am delighted to announce that the city council has made excellent progress to improve its environmental performance. Our first environmental statement (a review of the strategies progress) highlights the progress made in the first year. Some examples include:

- A reduction in carbon emissions by four per cent by March 2009 i.e. based on a six month period since the adoption of the strategy.
- Securing £400,000 of funding to support specific carbon reduction targeted projects.
- Reducing the amount of waste sent to landfill by almost a quarter.
- Completing a number of tree planting schemes around the city, of native and rare species.
- Successful launch and first year of the Norwich eco awards.
- Introducing the One small step scheme internally and externally to the council.

This is good progress, but we want to do more. In the next few years we have a lot of plans to further improve our environmental performance, including:

- Implementation of the Energy Savings Trust One to One support programme.
- A range of key energy saving projects:
 - Voltage optimisation of City Hall
 - Continued energy efficiency works.
 - St Giles Car Park Lighting upgrades

- Energy review of Riverside Leisure Centre
- Energy review of the Norman Centre.
- Enable construction of an environmentally sustainable development of 100 affordable homes.
- Ongoing development of the LDF core strategy in regards to environmental sustainability.
- Piloting innovative sustainable transport solutions such as freight transshipment centres or alternative fuels.
- A range of other projects including city car club, parking restrictions, and fuel trials.
- Improvement in air quality in three air quality management areas.
- Implement joint investment strategy to improve bus services with Norfolk County Council and First.

A summary of our achievements and future plans will be considered by the Executive at its meeting on 30 September 2009.

We are therefore very confident of meeting our 30 per cent reduction target over the next five year period. This target far exceeds the 10 per cent target set as part of the 10:10 campaign. For this reason, the city council's Climate Change Panel has recently declined to support the 10:10 carbon reduction campaign. We are already actively reducing our carbon emissions by working with the Carbon Trust on their Local Authority Carbon Management Programme, as well as the Energy Savings Trusts Local Authority One to One Programme."

Question 2

Councillor Niki George to the Executive Member for Community Safety and Community Cohesion:-

"In light of recent press coverage about the state of the Castle Mound, the Scrutiny process into anti-social behaviour in the Castle Gardens, the SNAP priorities and, of course, the charismatic response from Councillor Bremner at the September 2008 full Council meeting in reply to a question tabled by myself, could the Executive Member please tell us what was the result of the multi-agency approach to this important issue of promoting safe and clean use of the Castle area?"

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

"Firstly may I say thank you for the word "charismatic". I am just amazed as no one has ever used that word to describe me before! I doubt anyone will again. I am just waiting for it to be used against me in the follow up question.

As a result of requests to improve Castle Gardens, City Council officers are currently developing proposals to improve recreation space for teenagers and at the same time reduce the impact of anti-social behaviour in the gardens. The Council agreed to allocate £68,000 section 106 funds for play and open space to 'King Street/ Castle Gardens'. Unfortunately you were unable to be there when this was agreed at council, but sadly many councillors refused to support this including the entire Green

and Lib-Dem groups present. One of your fellow Conservative councillors even voted against it.

Using these funds officers have been asked to consider community safety and embankment improvements to Castle Gardens that will aim to improve safe and clean use of the Castle area.

Stakeholders, including the County Council, Castle Mall, Police and young people have been involved and proposals are being developed which will then be tested with partners during the autumn. It is important that the views of users including young people are involved in the preparation of a final design.

Following this consultation, final detailed design work will be undertaken and once a final design is agreed, a submission will be made to English Heritage for permission to undertake works to a scheduled ancient monument so that the works can be implemented. The timescale for the completion of this project will be clearer once all the stakeholders and English Heritage have made responses.

A variety of maintenance works have been undertaken in response to the issues raised and the area being designated a SNAP priority – though it is interesting to note that the gardens are no longer a priority.

Works completed or considered include:

- the grass bank area has been reseeded as an interim measure in an attempt to tidy up the appearance; however, the design of the area and desire lines does cause excessive amounts of wear.
- requests for a notice board to display notices explaining what is acceptable behaviour etc are being investigated. It is important that any signage reflects the historical context of the castle mound and gardens and that new signage is of a high quality design and appropriately located. The use of signage and if possible co-ordination with proposed new signage by Castle Museum will be explored. If at any point the museum sign is replaced the possibility of including any relevant information on that board will also be explored
- the SNAP panel requested that stubbing plates be fitted to the waste bins and this was done at the same time as more robust bins installed with the advice from the police, on location and planning on the design
- the moat house store has had more secure doors fitted and graffiti removed
- an approach to involve the castle museum directly in the wider gardens works has so far provide unsuccessful as they prefer to be involved via the SNAP panel
- litter clearance has improved following discussions with CityCare and those areas that are the responsibility of the Castle Mall have been identified and the Mall informed and action is being taken
- rough sleeping areas beside the bridge had a deep clean and work was carried out to remove sycamore seedlings and coppice other shrubs to open the areas up
- tree branches blocking CCTV coverage have been pruned
- works on the Whiffler theatre to remove the ivy off the front and protect the thatched roof with chicken wire have been completed

- Castle Mall Management and the Police all have Council's contact number to report graffiti and are now doing so
- the site is monitored at least weekly by the parks and open spaces officer
- investigations are continuing to establish a "coffee cart" concession in the area as this service could act as a "capable guardian." It is hoped to get this up and running for the spring
- discussions are in place with the county council to progress improved CCTV

Thank you for following this up. I feel there have been improvements made, and more to come. I feel the very successful work done by various agencies, especially officers of this council, should be applauded. I especially liked the Scrutiny Committee work on this problem, and I sadly missed the meeting that was held on site, but which led to a group of young people coming into City Hall and having their say. It sounded really positive."

Question 3

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

"Could the Executive Member please tell us how many of the savings identified by the Conservative Group at the 2009 Budget setting council meeting, which were rejected by both Labour Administration and the Green Opposition, have now been actioned or are being actively considered? To remind Council and the Executive Member, they include removing the political assistant's posts, reduction in postage costs, reducing councillor's allowances, reduction in newspaper/periodicals, a reduction in the training budget and a reduction in the "transformation and efficiency" budget."

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

"In responding to Councillor Fisher's question, can I also remind him of budget amendments from the Conservative group over the past two years which had they been passed would have eroded the funding base of the council and resulted in us having to find an additional £1 million in budget reductions and cuts on top of the £8 million gap we are working to close caused by the 2008 banking crisis.

I believe Councillor Fisher was present at the budget setting meeting of 24 February. At that meeting it was agreed to review all the Council's budgets following recommendations from the Executive made on 16 February 2009.

A package of savings measures for immediate implementation were agreed as were proposed savings that would be implemented following consultation with staff and residents.

The immediate savings include reductions in postage, newspapers and periodicals, and training costs. The process of review has identified the savings achievable and the steps necessary to achieve them so that they can be implemented in a planned and rational manner, rather than by building arbitrary cuts into the budget at levels which might not be achievable.

The budget for Members' Allowances has not been reduced. A full discussion of this issue will take place when council decides to give consideration to the recommendations of the Independent Panel. A discussion deferred by Council at its meeting of 31 March 2009.

The Council did agree a small reduction in the budget for the Transformation and Efficiency team, at a level which has allowed the work of the budget review to be undertaken speedily and effectively. A larger budget reduction, as proposed, would have reduced our capacity to do this work and to bring forward significant early savings and efficiencies.

Councillor Fisher's enthusiasm for cutting resources to the Transformation and Efficiency team has little to do with the budget and more to do with his hostility, as a member of Broadland District Council, to the City Council's bid for unitary status. The work undertaken by the team has not only enabled us to develop a robust and compelling case for Norwich gaining unitary status; but has also provided us with a route map to redesign the council so that the impact on services and employment is minimised and service delivery is brought closer to local communities within the City."

Question 4

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

"Norwich once boasted 363 pubs just inside the City walls, but by the end of last year this had fallen to 140 in the whole of the City. 2009 has continued to see pubs close and others struggle. Would the Executive Member agree with me that, whilst pubs remain a business, they are an important community facility and should be regarded as such? Has the Council made contact with either individual landlords/ladies or their industry groups to discuss the issue and offer any support in the last year? What support could a local authority offer in such testing times for the pub trade?"

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

"In replying to Councillor Antony Little's question I thought it might be helpful to provide a bit of historical background. I am grateful to research provided by 'HEART'

In the second half of the C19th, Norwich (at that time only just spilling beyond the walls geographically) had almost 2 pubs for every day of the year or just over 700 in total. Nationally pub numbers peaked in 1869 and have been falling ever since. Reasons for the decline are:

- Decline in the number of breweries. At one point Norwich had 29. In the 1960s Watneys/Grand Met took over the big Norwich brewers, who had themselves absorbed the smaller operators, and closed them all down to the extent that all brewing ceased in Norwich in the 1980's, with the exception of a couple of micro breweries.

- The result was fewer pubs as the big breweries rationalized their portfolios and took the profitable option of promoting alternative uses
- Changes in urban density – over 80,000 people lived within the Walls at the end of the C19th compared with about 8000 now
 - Decline in the amount we drink – we drink less than the Victorians and significantly less than the Georgians (Hogarth's Gin Alley etc)
 - Changes in drinking tastes – we drink more wine
 - Changes in leisure – in the Victorian period, the pub was one of the few leisure venues available particularly for the poor working class. Now we have TV, multiplex cinemas and a whole range of drinking venues that aren't pubs
 - Cut price supermarket beer creating more of a home drinking culture
 - During the housing boom of the new Millennium, a number of pub owners saw large profits in converting marginal pub sites into lucrative housing developments

In the present economic climate, managing any business through the current downturn is challenging. Reduced margins, falling sales and rising costs are particularly threatening for small businesses and these issues are often compounded for those in the licensed trade who may be operating within a tenancy or franchise arrangement which offers reduced flexibility to respond quickly to changes in the market.

Regardless of the structure of the business, there is action that can be taken to help businesses survive in a recession and organisations to support businesses through the process.

The first step for any business is a 'health check', which will isolate the key weaknesses and threats, as well as strengths and opportunities from which to develop an effective survival strategy. Business Link has an online business health check on its web pages or alternatively will provide the services of an advisor to help you through the process and access a range of other support as appropriate - these services are free and confidential and Norwich City Council has been promoting this service to all business ratepayers during the downturn. There are also a number of licensed trade associations who offer specialist advice and support to pub businesses and a list of contacts can be found on the Business Link website: www.businesslink.gov.uk. The most important action for any business in difficulties at the moment is to seek help promptly in order to take the right action before difficulties become so great that they reduce the chances of survival.

Norwich City Council supports the City Centre Partnership and funds the City Centre Partnership managers post. Norwich City Centre Partnership (CCP) has seen the increased pressures that the economic downturn is having on the Licensed Trade, the Night Time Economy and the City Centre. It has become increasingly important that all partners in Norwich private, public and voluntary sector organisations work together to ensure the city centre remains a vibrant and attractive place to live, work and visit.

The CCP has developed specific activities and initiatives to assist Norwich City Centre pubs and licensed businesses compete in a very difficult economic environment. These businesses are key in driving the vitality of the city centre. These projects include working with the Norwich City Licensing Forum which represents all the licensed venues in the city, supporting local purchasing through

the "Buy Local" campaign , project managing research and activities that will invigorate the early evening economy and supporting and working with individual licensed businesses

The CCP, working with the Norwich City Licensing Forum, has highlighted best practice, signposted licensed trade to business support schemes, developed a taxi marshal scheme to assist transport home in the city centre and is working with members to develop a radio security scheme that would add security and support to licensed premises. All these developments have come through engagement with the forum and discussions on addressing the economic downturn for pubs and the licensed trade.

The CCP has also begun work on an Early Evening Economy Pilot which aims to invigorate the "shoulder period" between 5pm and 9pm in the city centre (a low trading period for the licensed premises) through coordinating research, action and activities to increase customer numbers and the amount of time people stay in the city. The proposed areas for investigation and activity include reviewing the transport infrastructure, the negative perception of safety in the city and a branding and marketing which will assist pubs, bars and restaurants across the city centre to attract new customers."

In addition to these initiatives, and in the hope of giving Councillor Little some comfort, on the positive side Norwich still hosts the second largest beer festival in the UK and the largest provincial festival indicating that there is still a lot of local support for good beer and local breweries. The City Council obviously supports that initiative by providing the Halls as a venue.

We also have the very rare example of a pub winning CAMRA National Pub of the Year twice – the Fat Cat – demonstrating perhaps that quality rather than quantity is still alive and well. Lonely Planet also voted The Murderers 6th best pub in the World."

Question 5

Councillor Jeremy Hooke to the Leader of the Council:-

"It appears I was the last Lord Mayor to use the Civic Coach which is now deteriorating (soon beyond reasonable repair) through moth damage at Strangers Hall. Could the Leader of the Council please inform me of any plans to restore and / or move the Coach to a safer place?"

Councillor Steve Morphew, Leader of the Council's reply:-

"The civic coach is not 'beyond reasonable repair' and I am surprised and disappointed by Councillor Hooke's use of such emotive language. It has moths in some of the upholstery and this is treatable. The coach will be treated and restored in the very near future. A lot of work has already gone into trying to find a new home for the coach but if this is not possible it will continue to be on public display at Stranger's Hall."

Question 6

Councillor Tom Llewellyn to the Leader of the Council:-

“Does the Executive Member agree with the chairman of the East of England Regional Assembly who claimed, in a letter to the Communities Secretary, that: “The Government is in danger of promoting housing growth without adequate transport links, employment opportunities and social infrastructure”, following a cut in capital funding next year?”

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

“I’m aware that the letter written by the Chairman of the Regional Assembly was prompted by the recent government announcements regarding possible growth point funding cuts. These cuts are certainly of concern but I’m sure all of us are aware of the difficult financial circumstances faced by the government at the moment. However, it should be noted that these cuts have not been confirmed and through the Greater Norwich Development Partnership (GNDP) we will be working as hard as possible to minimise the extent of and impact of any cuts to the Greater Norwich growth budget.

It is also true to say that by the very nature of the development process there is always some degree of risk that whenever and wherever housing growth occurs it will not be accompanied by timely provision of adequate transport, economic and social infrastructure.

This is why getting the Joint Core Strategy adopted as soon as possible is so important. It is through the adoption of the Joint Core Strategy that the authority can maximise the chances the delivery of housing being accompanied by the full range of supporting infrastructure. Any failure to adopt the Joint Core Strategy increases the risks that development will be able to occur in a manner that isn’t fully supported by infrastructure provision.

I hope that in his supplementary question Councillor Dylan will take the opportunity of committing his personal support to the Joint Core Strategy.”

Question 7

Councillor Howard Jago to the Executive Member for Corporate Resources and Governance:-

“I have noticed that scaffolding has been up around the Guildhall for some time. Could the Executive member update me on how repairs are progressing?”

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

“The construction of the Guildhall began in 1407, but the clock tower which was a gift from the mayor at the time, Henry Woodcock, was not added until 1850. A condition of his gift was that a lathe and plaster ceiling that had been put up in the Council Chamber to reduce the height of that room, so it could be kept warmer, was removed revealing once again the rooms full proportions.

The clock tower hence has a strong historical connection, and as such we work closely with English Heritage to ensure any work done to the tower is appropriate. Our technical staff are in discussions with English Heritage concerning the method of repair of the tower. The damage is greater than originally anticipated due to embedded iron within the stonework. The tower will have to be partially dismantled to remove the iron work and carry out repairs.

The scaffolding is in place to ensure the stability of the tower, as otherwise there would be the risk of collapse. Once a scheme has been agreed with English Heritage, funding will be sought and a programme issued. We are not expecting that works can be agreed and commence in this financial year although it remains a priority scheme”

Question 8

Councillor Rupert Read to the Chair of the Planning Applications Committee:-

“In March 2007, planning permission was granted for flats to be built on the former Earl of Leicester Site on Dereham Road. The permission included a condition that "The development must be begun within 3 years of the date of this permission". Does the Executive member know whether the developer still intends to build on this site, and could he tell me what the status of the planning permission is if these 3 years pass?”

Councillor David Bradford, Chair of the Planning Applications Committee's reply:-

“Planning permission ref 06/01039/F was granted on 19 March 2007. The permission was granted subject to 8 conditions, three of which required the approval of various details before works started on site.

No applications have been submitted requesting the discharge of those conditions and there have been no conversations recently between planning staff and the developer.

If the conditions are not discharged and work not commenced within the three year time limit, then planning permission for the proposal would lapse. Any development of the site would then require a new permission.

However, changes recently introduced by the Department for Communities and Local Government have enabled developers to submit a formal application to extend the life of a permission provided the permission was extant on 1 October this year (when the new arrangements come into being) and when the application to extend (live) was submitted. It is not known whether it is the intention of the developer to submit such an application.

There is little else as a planning authority that we can do at the moment but I will ensure that you as a Ward Councillor are kept informed of any progress. I would emphasise that as Chair of Planning Applications Committee is not appropriate for me to comment on individual planning applications.”

Question 9

Councillor Tom Dylan to the Executive Member for Neighbourhood Development:-

“The recent closure of the ice rink at the Sports Village is a concern to many parents in Norwich. One parent told me that her children will now have to go to Peterborough to use an ice rink. I appreciate that the Sports Village is outside the City Council area but given that the ice rink was a popular facility for many families, does the Executive member know of any plans for a new ice rink facility in the Norwich area?”

Councillor Linda Blakeway, Executive Member for Neighbourhood Development’s reply:-

“The closure of this commercially run facility in the Broadland District Council area is a real loss to skaters, hockey players and ice dancers not least because of the long distance to travel to the next available ice rink and the fact that many participants are young people. Unfortunately the facility has struggled for some time to be financially viable, which proved even more difficult during this economic downturn. If the commercial leisure sector believes there is a business case for operating an ice rink facility in the Norwich city council area then the Council could assist with identifying suitable sites. At this stage however, no interest has been expressed and with the leisure sector in general consolidating its portfolios due to the current economic climate, the likelihood of interest in investing in a new ice rink is low.”

Question 10

Councillor Adrian Ramsay to the Executive Member for Sustainable City Development:-

“The new Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document was originally supposed to be adopted in June 2006. This document is crucial because it will ensure that the council starts to require more affordable housing to be included in new developments. Over three years after the original deadline, why has the policy still not been adopted?”

Councillor Steve Morphew on behalf of Councillor Brian Morrey, Executive Member for Sustainable City Development’s reply:-

“It was originally intended to adopt a revised Supplementary Planning Document for affordable housing in September 2008. However, shortly before then a legal case on this matter in another part of the country meant this council had to carry out further work before it could consider a revision to our planning guidelines. This work has now been completed and Executive will be recommended to adopt revised planning guidelines for affordable housing at its meeting on 30 September 2009.

Unless he has failed to understand the significance of the legal judgement on this issue, Councillor Ramsay would already have been very aware why the policy of the administration on this issue has been stalled. I hope he also appreciates that without development there can be no developer contributions, so to support affordable housing through developer contributions to make any real difference to meeting the need for significant development in the city suggests Councillor Ramsay now

understands the need for significant development in the city. I look forward to this being made explicit rather than implied.”

Question 11

Councillor Ruth Makoff to the Leader of the Council:-

“The Executive has decided against following the recommendation from the Audit Committee to allow representation from opposition parties on the Housing Improvement Board and the Corporate Improvement and Efficiency Board, nor to allow an observer to attend meetings of these boards. Given that recommendations are currently being made that will impact upon Council services for many years to come and upon many future Executives, why has the current Executive decided against this? “

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

“One of the many measures to ensure openness we have developed is encouragement of councillors to attend the Executive and contribute to our deliberations. The explanation was given at the meeting of the Executive some months ago and I can’t recall whether Councillor Makoff was there then, though I know she has attended. However she clearly has not understood the role of the CIEB, which has been merely to advise the Executive, and whose role is now starting to diminish. Things have moved on - though it seems some are still stuck in arguments that had little bearing on the main issues three months ago and have even less now. She will be pleased to hear that the Executive continues to perform the role set out for it in the council's constitution, in accordance with the constitution, and is proud to have developed the proper routes for our decisions to be scrutinised and for the administration to be held accountable. Until such time as council in its wisdom decides to replace the administration with a different one, we will continue to carry out our functions.

The timetable set out by the Executive for deciding on changes as a result of budget pressures includes scope for a dialogue with the city and consultation with stakeholders. I doubt they will be much interested in the make up of working parties. I can’t help but note the invitation I issued for any suggestions from councillors to deal with the budget problems had no response from other than my Labour colleagues. Perhaps, as chair of the Executive, it is time I revisited a number of issues including the parameters for contributions of councillors who are not members of the Executive at our meetings.

As Councillor Makoff will be aware, this matter is subject to a motion to tonight’s meeting. I am sure the city will be delighted that we will be spending time talking about membership of an advisory body that has no power rather than discussing anything of substance to the city. After all, what is dealing with a budget problem of £8m that threatens fundamental services to the city compared to membership of a non decision making body?

I look forward to responding to the debate on the motion later on.”

Question 12

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

“Given that the Council's current reserves have been reported to be below the recommended budgeted minimum for the year, could the Executive Member tell me whether the Council is on track to have retained the budgeted level of reserves at the end of this financial year?”

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

“The reserves have not been reported as being below the recommended minimum level. An estimate has been produced, which is one of several scenarios, which states that if certain risk scenarios impact adversely on the Council the reserves could fall below this minimum. The latest budget monitoring reports indicate that the Council's level of reserves should be above the recommended minimum level of reserves as at 31 March 2010.”

Question 13

Councillor Stephen Little to the Executive Member for Sustainable City Development:-

“Why did the Council fail to consult either the Norwich Access Group or the Norfolk Coalition of Disabled People on the type and siting of ticket machines in Council operated car parks and could we ensure that consultation does take place before any further installation?”

Councillor Steve Morphew on behalf of Councillor Brian Morrey, Executive Member for Sustainable City Development's reply:-

“The Council has to provide and install its machines to comply with the relevant British Standards and Department of Transport guidelines which define the specification, location and layout around car park payment machines for the disabled.

These national standards exist to ensure best practice, and hence by complying with these guidelines local consultation becomes unnecessary.

The Council has a very good working relationship with both the Norwich Access Group and the Norfolk Coalition of Disabled People and always seeks to consult with them on matters where there is scope for user input. The Executive considered the report on the changes to Blue Badge charges at off street surface car parks at its meeting on 24 June 2009. The report incorporates comments from both organisations. The Executive recommended the proposed charges with a further request on behalf of Mobilise, Promoting Mobility for Disabled People, to ensure that all car parks ticket machines were as accessible as possible and DDA compliant, to the Norwich Highways Agency Committee, who resolved to agree the changes.”

Question 14

Councillor Claire Stephenson to the Executive Member for Children and Young People:-

“Whatever happened to Campus Norwich?”

Councillor Susan Sands, Executive Member for Children and Young People’s reply:-

“Councillor Stephenson will be aware that the “Campus Norwich” concept was developed as part of our proposals for unitary status for the city. On 27 January 2009, Council agreed to:

‘Welcome the proposal being explored by the Executive to establish a ‘Campus Norwich’ partnership involving all Norwich schools and educational institutions and inclusive of families and communities to serve such a purpose and notes the intention to develop such a proposal for discussion within this Council and for wider public consultation during the next few months.’

Following the Council resolution, work initially continued to develop the “Campus Norwich” approach. However, as members will be aware, the unitary process has now been delayed pending the outcome of an appeal by the Boundary Committee against a High Court ruling. This appeal is due to be heard in early October 2009.

Norfolk County Council is currently the responsible authority for Norwich schools and other educational institutions. “Campus Norwich” is inextricably linked to the City Council’s unitary case, and given the current uncertainty about the unitary process it would therefore be inappropriate, at this time, for Norwich City Council to begin a wider public consultation on the ‘Campus Norwich’ proposal.

Members will also know that, in the light of the unitary delay, resources have been quickly refocused onto the identification and development of a range of efficiency and savings options to meet the Council’s emerging £8m budget gap for 2010/11. This has meant that a range of well developed options for efficiencies and savings have been able to be brought forward very quickly.

The ‘Campus Norwich’ approach/partnership remains an important future area for exploration for the City Council, but at present the unitary delay means that this work has been temporarily deferred. This situation will, of course, be reviewed once the outcome of the appeal court hearing is known, and the subsequent impact on the review process and timetable is clear.”

Question 15

Councillor Samir Jeraj to the Executive Member for Corporate Resources and Governance:-

“How could the council help residents whose employment is not constant, for example those who work in the construction industry, by streamlining the system by which they claim housing and council tax benefits when necessary? I have been

informed that the amount of paperwork involved is 'unjustified' and that mistakes on the council's part are not uncommon."

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

"If claimants are in and out of work frequently the Department of Works and Pensions (DWP) have set up a streamlined process for handling benefit claims. This went live in the Norwich Area on the 23 September 2009.

If the claimant is part this DWP project, there are no additional paperwork demands on the Council, but if they are not signing on, the claimant is required under Housing Benefit Regulations to make a new claim.

We are not aware of an unreasonable amount of errors. The national indicator for accuracy in benefit claims requires 99% accuracy on the quarterly sample of benefit claims. Currently we are achieving 100% accuracy on this sample.

I hope that this reassures Councillor Jeraj. I have provided hard evidence to demonstrate we are achieving 100% performance against the quarterly sample. I would be very interested to know the basis upon which he asserts that this is not the case. Hard evidence rather than what seems to be anecdotal comment would be welcome."

Question 16

Councillor Peter Offord to the Executive Member for Housing and Adult Services:-

"Council house tenants and some house owners on King Street and Argyle Street, who are sharing a communal aerial fitted by the council, are not receiving a digital signal via the Freeview boxes and have been contacting me with concern about this issue. What does the council consider doing about these council house tenants who are currently paying the council for a TV service using the analogue signal via a communal aerial (which includes some house owners) and have not been included within the current digital aerial upgrade?"

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

"The King Street area is recognised as being a bad area for reception of TV signals as it is low lying. Unfortunately until the analogue signal is switched off and the new digital signal switched on (which will be a stronger signal) there is very little the council can do to help. The work the council is doing around upgrading all communal aerials will ensure that the equipment we have in place is capable of receiving a digital signal.

We have been involved in upgrading aerials to flats because they are on a communal system which the council provides and maintains and which residents pay for. One of the options considered by the Executive was to not upgrade the system but it was agreed that as a good landlord this work should be carried out. The council has no responsibility to upgrade aerials to individual houses as these are residents own aerials.

There are short term options available to residents and we would of course be happy to discuss with individuals the options that are currently available to them.”

Question 17

Councillor Janet Bearman to the Executive Member for Community Safety and Community Cohesion:-

“Does the Executive member share my concerns that the neighbourhood policing consultation, which comes to an end this month, is imposing too great a uniformity on the SNAP process when what is needed is flexibility in design to adapt to the needs and culture of each neighbourhood?”

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

“The origins to the establishment of Safer Neighbourhoods in Norfolk (or Neighbourhood Policing as they are referred to nationally) was the Government White Paper, Building Neighbourhoods – Beating crime in 2004 and the subsequent action plan from “Neighbourhood Policing – your police, your community, your commitment from 2005.”

These set out to establish a new relationship between the Police, its partners and communities to reduce crime and disorder at a community level and signified a further area of very local community and neighbourhood level partnership working.

Neighbourhood policing, in the form of Safer Neighbourhood Teams, was fully implemented in Norfolk in April 2008 so that local people could have:

- **Access** – to local policing services through a named point of contact
- **Influence** – over policing priorities in their neighbourhood
- **Interventions** – joint action with partners & the public
- **Answers** – sustainable solutions & feedback on what is being done

Whilst a police led initiative, the roll out of Safer Neighbourhood Teams and the Safer Neighbourhood Action Panels in Norwich was undertaken in close co-operation with the Council and other partners one example being that the safer neighbourhood boundaries aligned or incorporated as far as possible to the Council’s operational areas for neighbourhood wardens and neighbourhood housing.

This approach recognised that:

- Norwich is an urban centre in a largely rural county
- Levels of community participation and approaches to neighbourhood working are different in Norwich than the rural areas of the county
- Levels of crime and disorder are higher in Norwich than compared to other parts of Norfolk

The Norfolk Constabulary are currently consulting on how the work of setting neighbourhood priorities which is currently undertaken by the SNAP’s can be improved.

The Police, City Council and other partners have access to a range of information and intelligence on local issues and it is important that priorities are set, are based upon all available information.

One of the aims is to try to widen the evidence gathering, to get to those hard to reach people and communities, and that is an excellent aim, but what is in place and working should not be thrown out. Let's use a cliché – "Don't throw out the baby with the bath water!"

I agree that the aim seems to be to produce a one-size-fits-all formula for priority setting meetings, and I feel a SNAP panels should be allowed to develop in a way which is most appropriate to the neighbourhood it represents and should not have to follow a prescribed formula which may not meet local expectations, and needs. What is suitable for a small rural community may not suit a large urban Council estate, and something different may be needed in a leafy suburb, and then something else for large City centre area.

I believe the Police should be allowed to be more flexible in their approach to community engagement and participation.

It is important that the approach to local working and local priority setting:

- continues to be developed in conjunction with partners
- reflects the City Council's neighbourhood strategy and a closer, broader and shared approach to neighbourhood working
- is accessible to and reflects the needs and capacity of the communities it aims to involve
- can be adapted to meet local circumstances and opportunities as no two areas of the city, let alone the county, are the same.

These are the principles that I have discussed with officers and am proposing to submit to the Norfolk Constabulary as part of their consultation."

Question 18

Councillor Bob Gledhill to the Leader of the Council:-

"At time of submitting this question, the statement "Norwich City Council would like to reassure people that no surcharge is applied when penalty charge notices are paid by credit card. The information on our website on this issue is not accurate and we are in the process of correcting it. We would like to apologise for any confusion caused as a result of this error." has appeared on the front page of the Council website for over a month. Why is this error taking so long to correct, and is there any evidence that the error has caused confusion or inconvenience to residents?"

Councillor Steve Morphew, Leader of the Council's reply:-

"The online payments system on the Norwich City Council website is managed by a specialist external company and the content is located on its server to ensure security for users. Any changes to the information in these pages can only be made by this company not by the City Council. We made a request as soon as the error was brought to our attention. We are looking at why it has taken so long to action our

request and how we can speed up this process as whilst retaining highest levels of security for our customers.

As to whether this has caused confusion or inconvenienced people, our deputy chief cashier and customer contact advisor specialist have received no comments or complaints, either about the incorrect information or about the statement currently on the home page of our website. In August we received two Freedom of Information requests to which we have responded.”

Question 19

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

“The average time between re-letting of council houses was 60 days in quarter one of this year. How much lost rental income does this represent, both as a sum of money and as a percentage of total income from housing rents, for that quarter?”

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

“Total rent due for the first 1st quarter of the year equals £ 12,428,328.26. The rent loss figure for this period equals £ 182,368. Had we been operating a 25 day void turnaround time, which would be top quartile, the loss would have been £75,987. Voids are always going to produce some loss in income but we do have some work to do to reduce our void turnaround.

The last quarter’s turnaround time is clearly unacceptable and officers are aware of this. There are a number of reasons for this increase; internally these include vacancies in our management structure and within the voids team. Externally we have been working with CityCare to bring their turnaround times down and their performance has improved to an acceptable level.

Now that we do have an Assistant Director and a Head of Neighbourhood Service in post we are putting measures in place to address the poor performance. Our new Head of Service, Tracy John is an experienced senior manager and reducing void turnaround time is one of her main priorities. As a result of this a review of the void process was carried out in August and housing managers are working together to embed sustainable improvements. The vacant post in the voids team has been filled and further research is being carried out to help deliver an improve void turnarounds performance by

- Improving acceptance rates first time,
- Joint working to ensure early intervention and sustain tenancies through an “Over the door step” information sharing and tenancy health checks
- Weekly reviews of all voids with key partners
- Advice for tenants/perspective tenants on moving (being prepared before you move during and after)
- Fortnightly exception reports to the Housing management team

As a result of this work the turn around time is already reducing and I am receiving weekly updates of voids performance rather than a monthly report.

However it is not simply the current high figures that concern us but the fact that the figures can fluctuate a good deal. This suggests that there are underlying factors which mean that the usual short term efforts that go in don't offer a long term solution. Therefore, as we have on so many other issues, we are asking officers to abandon the short term fixes and get right into the problem so it can be solved fully and properly. This is especially important so that when the new contract is set up the contractor starts and continues with a system that delivers consistent voids performance."

Question 20

Councillor Andrew Wiltshire to the Executive Member for Corporate Resources and Governance:-

"It recently came to my attention that Norwich City Council has been paying for a number of taxis for staff. In these times of economic crisis, is the policy of paying for taxis for staff amongst those currently under review, given that we ought to be encouraging people to use more public transport, and are staff who will need to travel regularly not expected to provide their own transport and subsequently claim the mileage at a previously agreed rate?"

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

"As you should be aware, all areas of council expenditure are under review as a response to the shortfall in the Council's budgets of £8million - largely down to the banking and financial crisis in 2008. On your specific points could I recommend that you familiarise yourself with the Council's Green Travel Plan which is on the Council's website and details the circumstances in which a user can provide their own transport. A user who is designated as an operational user can use their own transport and if based around City Hall is entitled to free parking. Other staff may use their own vehicle but are not entitled to free parking. This is just one option for travel and employees also have access to the council's fleet of pool cars. It may interest you to know that the procurement for the pool cars which arrived last year resulted in a saving of over £60k to the Council as well as reduced emissions and increased fuel efficiency.

Staff can also use motorbikes, cycles, public transport and taxis. When planning journeys, staff are expected to use the most efficient form of transport to them and this will include taxis when other options are more expensive, not available or are less practical. Taxi expenditure is highlighted to managers each month so that they can monitor usage."

Question 21

Councillor Joyce Divers to the Executive Member for Community Safety and Community Cohesion:-

'What does the council currently do and what does it cost this council to clear up after the 19,000 people who use the Prince of Wales Road and adjoining night time entertainment areas after a Friday or Saturday evening?'

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

"Prince of Wales Road and the surrounding area is cleaned in the early evening and mornings. The contractor is required to have the area cleaned by 9:00 am on a Saturday morning ready for the start of the normal daytime business day and 9:30 on a Sunday morning.

In addition the area is street washed when required to remove build up of grease and other stains that are not removed by the mechanical sweeper. In fact arrangements have already been made to jet wash some areas of Prince of Wales Road this Thursday.

Costs are unavailable at this moment as I am sure fellow members will appreciate the commercial sensitivity of this information whilst the contract is out to tender."

Question 22

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

'There is currently a great deal of concern about the amount and level of anti-social behaviour in Prince of Wales Road and the adjoining night time entertainment areas. The concern comes from residents who live in adjoining streets and the general public who pay for the policing of this volatile area. I understand there have been recent meetings between all interested parties to address these ongoing problems.

Please can the Portfolio Holder, whom one hopes was part of these meetings, tell Members what are the current measures in place to deal with anti-social behaviour and what are the future proposals?'

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

"I refer Council to my response to the petition received by Council earlier but will add a few extra points.

I would like to reassure Councillor Lubbock that I have been closely involved in a number of meetings that have quite rightly involved a number of different agencies - the issues are not those that can be solved by the City Council alone. The public meetings I have attended have been valuable and illuminating.

I have also visited the area, including the residential streets, to see what might be happening, and have in the past visited many of the clubs with the Licensing Committee. It is valuable to all councillors, especially those involved with planning, licensing and regulatory, to visit the area to see for themselves. We don't want decisions being made with inadequate information and experience, or false perceptions.

A great deal of work has and continues to be invested into managing the impact of the night time economy which contributes to Norwich being a very vibrant and dynamic City.

However with 15-20,000 coming into the city centre to enjoy the pub and club scene on a Friday and Saturday night, this puts strain on a number of public services. But it is clear that the problems are not all within the control of the City Council, and some responsibility has to fall upon the clubs and bars who should be making sure their customers have not had too much to drink, and making sure that they have enough, easily accessible toilets. Or the fact that many individuals come "pre-loaded" with cheap, alcohol purchased from supermarkets.

The Police have responded to the recent concerns by agreeing to deploy local Safer Neighbourhood Team officers into the residential areas until 3.00 am on Friday and Saturday nights to address the reported ASB, while the normal public order Policing will continue to focus on the main zones such as the Prince of Wales Road itself. The concern over recent violent crime incidents linked to the night-time economy has meant that this Public Order Policing has been enhanced.

The Night-time Economy area is not always seen by many Norwich and Norfolk residents in a positive light and this negative perception clouds people's views. I assume from the tone of your question that includes yourself. In reality if and when there are problems they are confined to a small area. Norwich is no worse than comparable towns and cities, and most of the times it is far better.

The Norwich Licensing Forum has recently prepared a very useful report on the issues of Prince of Wales Road during the evenings and contains a number of proposals. These include policing, traffic management, the development of the successful taxi-marshalling scheme, the availability of toilets, and role of door staff to name a few.

These now need close appraisal and discussion with a range of agencies and partners to consider how they can be taken forward.

As well as the suggestions mentioned above you will know that as part of the Norwich Area Transportation Strategy (NATS) consultation, coming out in October and agreed last week at the Norwich Highways Agency Committee (NHAC) there are plans for making Rose Lane two-way and the Prince of Wales Road bus only, which, if agreed and implemented, would greatly facilitate the possible late evening closure of the road, for safety reasons.

The Prince of Wales Road and the night-time economy is important for the City in so many ways, for employment, for the businesses, for the suppliers of goods, but also

for the people of Norwich, and far beyond, who get so much enjoyment from their visits.

But local residents have rights too, and it is making sure that the vibrant night-time economy is able to flourish, while making sure that residents do not suffer from anti-social behaviour, criminal damage and other crimes, which should be our aim. It will be hard, but a worthwhile target.”

Question 23

Councillor Brian Watkins to the Leader of the Council:-

"There is no doubt that this council faces huge challenges in finding budget cuts of over £8 million for 2010/11. Will the Leader reassure council tax payers that all options will be considered when looking for savings and new ways of delivering services, such as working with our neighbouring district councils and the County Council as well as investigating working with not for profit and voluntary organisations in delivering services?"

Councillor Steve Morpew, Leader of the Council's reply:-

“As Councillor Watkins was at the Executive and heard my statement about the principles we were applying I am surprised at the question. The statement is appended to the minutes of the Executive, was fully reproduced by the Norwich Evening News and I am happy to provide him with a copy. In summary the principles we are applying are set out below. If he disagrees with them perhaps he would make the Lib Dem position clear, though he will forgive my low expectations.

Councillor Watkins will be aware that the primary focus of our cost reduction work has been to explore opportunities for efficiencies, which will have no impact on staffing or front-line services. I am pleased to say that progress on this has been good, and the majority of the draft savings proposals agreed by Executive on 16 September will be about delivering the same level of services for less.

However, the scale of the overall £8m savings target, which represents around 15% of our controllable spending, means that there will be an inevitable impact on some staff and on service levels. In this regard we have been working against a set of clear principles;

1. There will be no extension of privatisation of services although we will be looking at opportunities to work with other public sector bodies to share services and potentially work in partnership on projects with public, voluntary, not for profit and private sector partners
2. Whilst there are likely to be significant job losses in the council we will do everything we can to minimise people being made redundant. The cost in financial and loss of expertise terms is too high. Natural wastage, redeployment and other ways of reducing staff costs makes more sense.

3. We will avoid front line service reductions in the services local people value most – we will prioritise keeping the streets clean, making people feel safe in their homes and on their streets and helping people during the recession. Where there is no option other than to reduce services the reductions will be done in ways that seek to protect those areas most in need of support. We will talk to residents about the differing needs of different areas of the city.
4. Whilst there will be formal consultation where necessary, we intend to develop a dialogue with residents about how their council will operate in the future. So while we may set dates by which we want to hear views on specific topics there is no restriction on when and how people can have their say. The development of locality and neighbourhood services will enhance people's ability to influence what goes on in their area and their city. As that evolves we want to encourage residents to talk with the council in ways that suit them best.

Inevitably making these changes against such a financial backdrop is not what we would choose, and equally we would prefer to see them made in a way and at a time when things were on the up. However that just is not where the world is and we have a choice of responding to the problem in a creative and forward looking way or, as is perhaps traditional, making swingeing cuts and hoping and waiting for better times.

Making the change is both radical as a response and will have radical consequences. Before the recession Norwich was on the cusp of realising the opportunities we had earned as a city to bring investment, prosperity and quality of life to our growing population. We now have the chance to lead the recovery and be at the forefront of a prosperous, sustainable and proud city. The City Council is facing up to our responsibilities to local people and I am asking everyone to play their part in making the changes, and to help us make decisions on priorities by letting us have your views and accepting that sometimes things just can't be as we might ideally want."

Question 24

Question relating to Urgent Matters (Appendix 1, Rule 12.3 (ii))

The following question relating to urgent matters was taken with the consent of the Executive Member for Corporate Resources and Governance.

Councillor Judith Lubbock to the Executive Member for Corporate Resources and Governance:-

"Following the Office of Fair Trading investigation with price-fixing practices, what measures are the council taking to ensure that Norwich taxpayers are protected from illegal anti-competition activity from contractors?"

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

"The Constitution has Contract Standing Orders which are designed to ensure that competition is encouraged through wide advertising of the Council's requirements. The Council uses the Official Journal of the European Union (OJEU) to advertise

higher value contracts and www.supply2.gov.uk to advertise lower value opportunities to encourage wide participation in the Council's tenders and quotations. A common feature of the cases reported by the Office of Trading (OFT) was a low number of tenders and effective advertising can help to increase the numbers who submit tenders. The Head of Procurement and Service Improvement is reviewing the OFT report and guidance on avoidance and detection of bid rigging to see if there are further steps that the Council can take to reduce the risk of anti-competitive activity by contractors. The Council has a dedicated Procurement Team who are trained to research markets and potential suppliers, design tender processes to maximise competition and encourage new suppliers to bid, ensure requirements are clearly stated along with clear evaluation criteria and review bids for suspicious activity. The Team works with service departments to ensure that value for money is obtained for all bought in goods, services or works.”