



MINUTES

COUNCIL

7.30pm – 10.05pm

26 November 2013

Present: Councillors Driver (Lord Mayor), Ackroyd, Arthur, Barker, Blunt, Boswell, Bradford, Bremner, Brimblecombe, Brociek-Coulton, Button, Carlo, Galvin, Gayton, Gihawi, Grahame, Grenville, Harris, Haynes, Henderson, Jackson, Kendrick, Little, Lubbock, Macdonald, Manning, Maxwell, Neale, Price, Sands(M), Sands(S), Stammers, Stephenson, Stonard, Storie, Waters and Wright

Apologies: Mr John Jennings (Sheriff) and Councillors Howard and Thomas

1. LORD MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Lord Mayor welcomed members of the public to the meeting and said he was pleased to see so many there and gave a particular welcome to those attending their first council meeting. He said that he understood that many of the public had attended for the 'bedroom tax' item so he would take that item earlier than planned on the published agenda.

The Lord Mayor said that since the last meeting he had attended a number of events including going on a bus tour of the city with the Bignold School. Afterwards the pupils had made pictures and other artwork representing the buildings that they had seen on their tour.

He had also participated in the launch of the 'Norfolk Says No' campaign against domestic violence.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

3. QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

Question 1

David Peel to the deputy leader of the council and cabinet member for resources:

"Given Labour's decision to repeal the Spare Room Subsidy should it come to power in less than two years, could the city council make a pledge tonight at full council not to evict any of its tenants as a result of rent arrears or other issues resulting from this unjust government policy. Such a popular decision by the city council would be welcomed across this city and in other local authorities across this country, who have taken the same stand."

Councillor Waters, the deputy leader of the council and cabinet member for resources to provide oral response at the meeting.

"Thank you for your topical question. The vast majority of people in this chamber tonight are here because of their opposition to the bedroom tax and other welfare changes. It is important that the opposition remains united and focuses its attack on the coalition government that is responsible for the bedroom tax. It is a national policy, enshrined in law and regulation. We have called on the government to withdraw the provisions of the 'Bedroom Tax'

A labour government will immediately repeal it and the labour front bench, as it did, on 12th November forced a vote to get the provisions of the "bedroom tax" overturned – but it was defeated by a combined liberal democrat and conservative party MPs. Only two lib – dems votes against and neither were Simon Wright the MP for Norwich South. I would not discount strong and united opposition getting changes/concessions/ perhaps abolition before the next election in 2015): if we remain united!

I can give you the assurance that we are following the spirit and intent of your question and this was reflected in the motion we passed in March 2013. This explicitly stated that the council would take into consideration the sum by which a household's housing benefit has been reduced by the bedroom tax in determining whether to initiate proceedings to recover a tenancy as a consequence of rent arrears. The Liberal Democrat Group was the only party to abstain on this motion.

We are doing everything humanly possible to support and protect people not only from the impact of the bedroom tax but right across the range of welfare cuts that affect the young and old; people with disabilities; those with work and without. For example - loss of up to £3,800 in entitlements to Working Tax Credits for people in low paid work; the Benefit Cap - the losers of families with children £62 a week on average. Local housing allowance (shared room rate) – loss of £32 a week.

A report on welfare reform – that went to our recent scrutiny committee, lays out in detail all the support we provide and continue to provide. But the scale of the cuts – the impact on Norwich is around £35 million – means we can only mitigate the impact when you consider that controllable spend of our general fund budget is around £20 million.

Where we have discretion we have used it to the maximum – we are one of only 57 councils in England that has not changed council benefit rules which remains at 100% for people on low incomes.

By law we are under a duty to recover debt and we have to have provision for doing this: the law is absolutely clear on this point. All members of the council know this is this case and I am sure colleagues in the green group will acknowledge that point when speaking to their motion later this evening.

We need to work together to keep the pressure on the coalition government to repeal the bedroom tax and roll back other welfare reforms that are doing so much damage to the fabric of our community and to the lives of growing numbers of people in Norwich.”

David Peel asked, as a supplementary question, how the cabinet member would deal with the Norfolk people’s assembly if anyone was faced with having bailiffs sent round as a result of the ‘bedroom tax’. **Councillor Waters** said that one of the first things anyone in difficulty as a result of the ‘bedroom tax’ should do is to visit the constituency offices of Chloe Smith MP and Simon Wright MP. He emphasised that anyone in difficulty or who needed advice only needed to ask the council. There have been many examples when the council has been able to help people to identify and take advantage of opportunities they did not know existed. No-one should be in any doubt that the council’s ambition was to ensure that people keep in their houses, are fed and warm. He emphasised that the real enemy was in Westminster and everyone opposed to the ‘bedroom tax’ should work together in a unified way to lobby against it. The two local MPs needed to feel the pressure.

Public question 2

Ann Ray to ask the leader of the council:

“Given the forthcoming anniversaries of the WW1, and the growing awareness of the need to continue the struggle to end all wars, will the city council allow Peace Pledge Union's white poppies to be sold along with the British Legion's red poppies from city hall and other council properties, eg community centres? This would not take council resources, as supply and collection would be organised by voluntary bodies - quakers currently arrange distribution - and many Norwich residents have asked for white poppies to be more easily available.”

Councillor Arthur, leader of the council, to provide an oral response at the meeting.

The commemoration of the start of the First World War next year will be a further opportunity for us to remember all those who have lost their lives in war and those who continue to die in conflict across the world today.

The red poppy has long been an evocative symbol of what many hoped would be that ‘war to end all wars’.

For many the red poppy is both a symbol of remembrance and peace. Some however, prefer to wear the white poppy and the red side by side.

The Royal British Legion has no objection to white poppies, or any group expressing their views. They see no conflict in wearing the red poppy alongside the white poppy.

Currently the city council sells poppies from city hall and If Norwich Quakers would like to arrange a supply of white for Remembrance Day we would be happy to make these available to the public.

Public question 3

Chris Herries to ask the deputy leader of the council and cabinet member for resources:

Can the Cabinet Member for Resources confirm that Norwich City Council supports the single person council tax discount? What steps are being taken to ensure that scaremongering on this issue is rebutted by the city council?

Councillor Waters, deputy leader of the council, replied:-

I am pleased that you have raised this question because I have seen literature put out by Chloe Smith, MP for Norwich North talking about 'Labour's unfair tax changes' stating that Labour councils want to abolish the council tax discount for people who live on their own'.

Nothing could be further from the truth. Norwich City Council supports the single person council tax discount because it is a statutory obligation. What I find particularly offensive is the fact that Chloe Smith was fully committed to voting for localisation of council tax benefit which has adversely affected nearly 2 million low income households across Britain. On this issue she remains silent.

I will be writing to Ms Smith to ask her to apologise to Norwich residents for misleading them on the matter of the single person discount. I hope the press records this point so those people unduely affected by this can have their minds set at rest.

Public question 4

Roger Ryan to ask the cabinet member for neighbourhoods and community safety:

The City Council recently took steps to close a 'crack house' in Ebenezer Place using powers contained in previous Labour government legislation to tackle crime and anti-social behaviour. Is the cabinet member for housing concerned that these powers might be weakened by the Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Bill?

Councillor Bremner, cabinet member for housing, replied:-

The current Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Bill is currently moving through the parliamentary process, and as such is subject to change.

At present, current 'crack house closure' legislation (Part 1 - ASB Act 2003) authorises the closure of premises used for the supply and use of class A drugs. This power sits with the police, but there is a requirement to consult with local authorities when applying (as happened recently at Ebenezer Place). A crack house closure order lasts for up to 3 months, but can be extended up to a maximum of 6 months.

I am concerned that these tough measures are being significantly threatened and weakened by the government's Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Bill.

8 out of 10 people told the ONS anti-social behaviour had got worse in the last year. All the evidence is that anti-social behaviour is a growing problem. But you wouldn't know it, thanks to what the Tory-led government have done. They've abolished labour's ASBOs and replaced them with something called 'Crime Prevention Injunctions' – watering our powers to tackle anti-social behaviour.

Before, if you violated an ASBO, it was a criminal offence. But it won't be a criminal offence to break an injunction, and it won't result in a criminal record.

I'm sure that local people suffering from anti-social behaviour would think that that behaviour was criminal – but it seems that the Tories and Lib Dems don't agree. What's more, the police and local authorities are now going to have to pay if they want to pursue civil proceedings against any offenders.

Incredibly, the Tories and Lib Dems are also increasing red tape and making it harder for local communities and police to get CCTV installed if they want it. Not only is this making it even harder to fight anti-social behaviour, but it's costing more too – an estimated £14 million extra.

I can assure you Mr Ryan that myself and colleagues will be monitoring this legislation carefully and that Norwich City Council will continue to use all measures available to tackle the tiny minority of criminals who seek to use our properties for drug dealing and other anti-social behaviour.

At core I have always believed that people have the right to a quiet life, free from intimidation and abuse. So I am proud that our housing department took the steps needed to provide security for the people living in Ebenezer Place.

Thank you for your question.

Public question 5

Christopher Elderton to ask the cabinet member for neighbourhoods and community safety:

“How many homeless dogs have been re-homed?”

Councillor Kendrick, cabinet member for neighbourhoods and community safety, replied:-

For the six months from 1 January to 30 June this year the council has collected 130 stray dogs of which: -

42 have been successfully reunited with their owner
78 have been rehomed through the kennels we use
9 were in kennels and
1 was passed to the RSPCA for further investigations into abuse

The council has recently awarded a new contract to Norstead for the provision of kennels for our stray dog service. On notification of the award Norstead commented

“how very proud they were to have found homes for over 800 homeless dogs during the time they have been associated with us. This shows, without any doubt, the kindness and commitment to animals in need by Norwich City Council. You have allowed us to get on with the difficult task of re-homing, which does come with some sort of cost which ever way you look at it and NOT turn the other way which is so very easy to do and leave the threat of death by putting to sleep as happens with some uncaring Authorities. The way Norwich city Council and Norstead have proven over the last 6-7 years has set the standard.”

Please also note that all litter bins, including those in our parks, are dual use bins for litter and dog mess. I would encourage all dog owners to pick up their dog mess and dispose of it in the litter bins provided.

4. MOTION – ‘BEDROOM TAX’

The Lord Mayor said that, as he announced earlier, this item would be taken next because a large number of members of the public had attended to hear the debate.

He said that the following amendment had been received from Councillor Wright and had been circulated:

‘To amend paragraph 2 by adding the following at the end –
‘...ensuring that people are not penalised as a result of the long term chronic under-supply of social housing or changes to family circumstances.’

The Lord Mayor said that Councillor Haynes had indicated that she was willing to accept the amendment and, with no member objecting, it became part of the substantive motion.

Councillor Haynes moved, and Councillor Galvin seconded, the motion as set out on the agenda and as amended above.

With 17 members voting in favour (Councillors Ackroyd, Blunt, Boswell, Brimblecombe, Carlo, Galvin, Grahame, Haynes, Henderson, Jackson, Little, Lubbock, Neale, Price, Stammers, Stephenson and Wright) and 20 voting against (Councillor Arthur, Barker, Bradford, Bremner, Brociek-Coulton, Button, Driver, Gayton, Gihawi, Grenville, Harris, Kendrick, Macdonald, Manning, Maxwell, Sands(M), Sands(S), Stonard, Storie and Waters) paragraph 1 of the motion was declared lost.

RESOLVED, unanimously, to repeat the call to the coalition government to withdraw the provisions of the Welfare Reform Act relating to the so called ‘under occupation’ in social housing (‘the bedroom tax’) ensuring that people are not penalised as a

result of the long term chronic under-supply of social housing or changes to family circumstances.

5. PETITIONS

No petitions had been received.

6. MINUTES

RESOLVED to agree the accuracy of the minutes of the meeting held on 24 September 2013 subject to question 3 in appendix A being amended to show that Councillor Haynes asked the supplementary question not Councillor Lubbock.

7. QUESTIONS TO CABINET MEMBERS/COMMITTEE CHAIRS

The Lord Mayor advised that 16 questions had been received from members of the council to cabinet members and committee chairs, of which notice had been received in accordance with the provisions of appendix 1 of the council's constitution, and the questions were as follows –

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| Question 1 | Councillor Stephenson to the Leader of the Council on marathon sponsorship. |
| Question 2 | Councillor Galvin to the cabinet member for resources on Train Wood and Marriott's Way. |
| Question 3 | Councillor Neale to the cabinet member for environment, development and transport on pavement snow clearance. |
| Question 4 | Councillor Grahame to the cabinet member for environment, development and transport on licensing and regulation of sex entertainment venues. |
| Question 5 | Councillor Haynes to the cabinet member for housing on window, kitchen and bathroom replacement. |
| Question 6 | Councillor Price to the cabinet member for environment, development and transport on an early morning restriction order for Norwich. |
| Question 7 | Councillor Lubbock to the cabinet member for resources on the new homes bonus. |
| Question 8 | Councillor Storie to the cabinet member for housing on the impact of the 'bedroom tax'. |
| Question 9 | Councillor Harris to the Leader of the Council on the 'walk to' programme. |
| Question 10 | Councillor Button to the Leader of the Council on the Energy Company Obligation. |
| Question 11 | Councillor Barker to the Leader of the Council on the joint core strategy. |
| Question 12 | Councillor Brociek-Coulton to the cabinet member for environment, development and transport on the Cycling Ambition initiative. |

- Question 13** Councillor Maxwell to the leader of the council on the City Deal for Norwich.
- Question 14** Councillor Gayton to the cabinet member for resources on food banks.
- Question 15** Councillor Ackroyd to the cabinet member for environment, development and transport on barriers on footpaths.
- Question 16** Councillor Wright to the cabinet member for environment, development and transport on empty houses.

(2 hours having passed since the start of the meeting, the Lord Mayor asked if any of the remaining items could be taken as unopposed business. Items 8 – 12 below were taken as unopposed business)

8. CONSTITUTION REVIEW

RESOLVED, unopposed, to –

- (1) adopt the financial regulations, as set out in appendix A of the annexed report;
- (2) adopt amendments to the council and committee rules, appendix 1 of the council's constitution as follows:
 - (a) **Questions by the public**
 - to remove the ability of the public to ask questions at the regulatory committees as there are already procedures for following the public to make representations and address the committees
 - to move the deadline for submission of questions to council or committee to three working days before the meeting.
 - (b) **Questions by members**
 - to enable members to ask questions at cabinet meetings and include the principle that questions to cabinet/council should only be asked as a last resort
 - to remove the ability to ask questions at regulatory committees for the same reasons as for the public.
 - (c) **Appointment of substitute members**
 - to enable groups to nominate any number of members who have undertaken the appropriate training as substitutes for the regulatory committees.

(d) Motions to council

- to accept motions only if the name of both the mover and seconder is provided.
- (3) approve the amendments to appendix 7, access to information rules to reflect the changes to legislation and confirm that a key decision in relation to financial decisions, whether relating to expenditure or savings, is defined as being over the OJEU a public procurement directive threshold;
- (4) ask the head of law and governance to amend the constitution accordingly.

9. ANNUAL REPORT OF THE MONITORING OFFICER

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

10. NORMAN CENTRE – MILLAR HALL WORKS: CAPITAL PLAN AND PROGRAMME

RESOLVED, unopposed, to include £121,000 in the capital plan and capital programme 2013/14 in respect of works at Millar Hall, Norman Centre.

11. BOWTHORPE THREESCORE INFRASTRUCTURE – INCLUSION IN CAPITAL PLAN AND PROGRAMME

RESOLVED, unopposed, to include £1,864,835 in the capital programme 2013/14 and 2014/15 to fully fund the infrastructure for the construction of Threescore.

12. MOTION – MENTAL HEALTH

The Lord Mayor said that the following amendment had been received from Councillor Little in advance of the meeting –

‘to add additional point - 11) write a letter of support to the newly established staff-led campaign to save mental health services in Norfolk and Suffolk’.

The Lord Mayor said that although this was adding a new proposal, Councillor Arthur had earlier indicated that she was willing to accept the amendment and Councillor Wright had no objection. With no other member objecting, he allowed this to become part of the substantive motion.

RESOLVED, unopposed, to –

- 1) sign the Local Authorities’ Mental Health Challenge run by Centre for Mental Health, Mental Health Foundation, Mind, Rethink Mental Illness, Royal College of Psychiatrists and YoungMinds;
- 2) appoint an elected member as ‘mental health champion’ across the council;

- 3) identify a 'lead officer' for mental health to link in with colleagues across the council;
- 4) follow the implementation framework for the mental health strategy where it is relevant to the council's work and local needs;
- 5) work to reduce inequalities in mental health services in our community;
- 6) work with the NHS to integrate health and social care support and request that the Norwich Clinical Commissioning Group re-commission some of its mental health services to those with a community and local element;
- 7) promote wellbeing and initiate and support action on public mental health;
- 8) tackle discrimination on the grounds of mental health in our community;
- 9) proactively engage and listen to people of all ages and backgrounds about what they need for better mental health;
- 10) sign up to the Time to Change pledge; and
- 11) write a letter of support to the newly established staff-led campaign to save mental health services in Norfolk and Suffolk.

13. LOCAL AUTHORITY MORTGAGE SCHEME

Councillor Waters moved, and Councillor Maxwell seconded, the recommendations in the annexed report.

RESOLVED, with 23 voting in favour, 8 against and 6 abstentions, to add £1 million to the 2013/14 capital programme for the cash deposit to support the indemnity as part of the local authority mortgage scheme.

CHAIR

Question 1

Councillor Stephenson to ask the leader of the council:

“Could the council look carefully at the costs and benefits of working with sponsors and race organisers to start a new Norwich city half and/or full marathon, starting and ending in the city? This could help the city achieve its Healthy City aims, and help traders in the city centre.”

Councillor Arthur, leader of the council’s response:

“The city council works hard to both attract and develop new events as well as to maintain our current vibrant events programme. We are always happy to talk to organisers who have the resources and expertise to put on major events of this nature and would be happy to offer advice.

We already work with CONAC (City of Norwich Athletic Club) the local running club who organise the Lord Mayors 5 k road race. You may have also noticed that there was another 5k run at the Norwich showground last weekend

In the past we have had a number of approaches from organisations wishing to develop and run a marathon in the city centre. But given the scale of resources needed to do this they have always decided not to proceed.

An activity like a marathon in a city centre would take a lot of time and money to organise and would mean other popular activities would need to be stopped to create capacity.

The council has had discussions in the past with CONAC (City of Norwich Athletic Club) the local running club who organise the Lord Mayors 5 k road race regarding organising a marathon in the city centre.

CONAC have not pursued this as the cost and resource implications are significant. If Councillor Stephenson knows of a major sponsor who would invest a considerable sum to put on such an event then please do let us know and we will be happy put them in touch with the relevant organisation.”

In the meantime we will continue to take our civic role in the Healthy City network by working organisations such as Active Norfolk and the Clinical Commissioning group. Activities which will be developed by our sports team as a result of the recent £228,000 we received to improve walking initiatives in Norwich together with initiatives such as the Park runs and the tennis development following our successful bid to improve the courts at Eaton Park are all already contributing to our healthy City aims. In terms of helping city centre traders I believe our existing range of events makes a significant contribution to the trade in Norwich. In addition our work with the Business Improvement District enables us to build on this and work with local traders to help them achieve more. ”

Question 2

Councillor Galvin to ask the cabinet member for resources:

“Further to Councillor Waters' response to a question earlier this year about how the city council would support Friends of Train Wood and Marriott's Way, he was kind enough to recommend that the group applies for a city council 'small community grant'. Having worked hard to save it from sale and keen to keep momentum and look after it, the group developed a bid (for some litter pickers and gloves among other things) with officers. However at the last moment, unknown to the group, the bid was 'deferred' before the grants panel met. Please can you explain to the group: who deferred it, exactly which terms and conditions they were working to, and why they consider this community group does not deserve the support of the city council at this present time? “

Councillor Waters cabinet member for resources' response:

“The council has a clear and transparent process for the award of community grants which is laid out in guidance notes for applicants that are available on the council's website.

When the council receives completed grant applications, they are assessed by two officers who do not have any connection with the group, to ensure the assessment is as independent as possible. The officers are asked to make an initial recommendation on whether an award should be made, the level of this award or if it should be refused with the reasons for their recommendation.

These assessments are reviewed by the executive head of communications, customers and culture and head of local neighbourhood services to ensure a consistent approach has been carried out by the assessors. Recommendations are then reported to the community grants working party for a decision.

The recommendation to the all party small grants working panel on the application from the Friends of Train Wood, was to defer the application on the basis that ownership of the land rests with Norfolk county council who are yet to determine who will have management responsibility and that this needs to be resolved prior to the council considering a grant application.

It would be inappropriate for the city council to award a grant to a group for the management of a site where the group does not have approval from the land owner, either in the form of an agreement, licence or similar.

In addition, if Norfolk County Council agrees to transfer the management of Train Wood to the group, the city council will need to understand what financial support the county council will be making to the group for the future maintenance of the site.

This recommendation was noted by the panel.

Once these points have been finalised, the council will re-consider the application.”

Councillor Galvin asked, as a supplementary question, why officers did not inform the group of these issues and would the cabinet member look at the guidance again

to ensure that it was clear. **Councillor Waters** said the grants working party was a cross party group and green members were involved in the decision to note the recommendation to defer the grant application. The reasons are transparent. It would be inappropriate for the council to give a grant without knowing if an agreement had been reached between the group and Norfolk County Council, what that agreement entailed and the clarity of how any grant made would be spent. The council cannot commit public funding without having the answers to these issues. He suggested that Councillor Galvin pressed her case with her county council colleagues and the grant application would remain deferred until the council had more information on how it would be used.

Question 3

Councillor Neale to the cabinet member for environment, development and transport's response:

"Last winter, following heavy snowfalls, pavements into and out of the city for pedestrians were still impassable, even on main roads, two weeks after the roadways were cleared. This is a major issue especially for old people. In one week at the height of the icy pavement situation, the Norfolk and Norwich treated 45 people with serious fractures requiring emergency surgery following snow related falls (the normal figure for that time would be zero to very few). Given the fact that we are predicted an extra cold winter, will the city council look at how it could make sure that at least some key pavement routes are cleared of ice at the same time as roads?"

Councillor Stonard, cabinet member for environment, development and transport's response:

"Norfolk County Council as highway authority takes the lead in providing winter maintenance services in the city. They grit the main road network and also de-ice certain priority footways and pedestrianised areas in the city centre.

The city council supports this work by providing grit bins in priority areas which are not regularly gritted, such as where there is a marked gradient or sharp bend on quieter roads. The number of highway grit bins provided by the council has increased by 32 on the 280 provided last year. With a further 9 provided by the county council at key main road junctions this brings the total number to 321.

The council also grits certain areas of non-highway land such as car parks, sheltered housing footways and some public spaces such as the War Memorial Gardens. A further 77 grit bins are provided on non highway council land as well.

The precautionary gritting carried out is effective at reducing the risk of ice and even after heavy snow carriageways will generally become passable again relatively quickly. The effect of gritting on adjacent footways is much less and after heavy snow followed by a period of sub-zero temperatures footways can become difficult to use.

Last year the highway contractor's staff unable to undertake their normal routine maintenance activities were redirected to clear snow. However the number of staff available is quite low and the effect of this was therefore limited.

Mindful of the problems that can occur on footways, county and city council officers have reviewed their winter maintenance plans for this year. When snow is lying on the ground for an extended period some of the council's other contractor staff (e.g. grounds maintenance) will be unable to carry out their normal duties. Where possible they will therefore be re-directed to clear snow as well thereby increasing the councils' capacity to remove lying snow. The priority will be on streets with a high footfall such as those in the city centre, main walking routes and by shopping parades.

The council's winter maintenance activities can be helped by residents and local businesses. As well as applying grit from the grit bins they can clear snow themselves. There is no law preventing someone from doing this and it is also very unlikely that they would face any legal liability, as long as the person is careful and uses common sense to ensure that you do not make the pavement or pathway clearly more dangerous than before (e.g. do not use water as this will re-freeze). It is also the case that people using areas affected by snow and ice, also have responsibility to be careful themselves."

Councillor Neale said that the department for communities and local government could award payments for public health benefits and asked, as a supplementary question, if the cabinet member would explore whether the DCLG would be willing to make such a payment for path clearance in Norwich. **Councillor Waters** said that the DCLG was unlikely to agree but he would be happy to ask the question.

Question 4

Councillor Grahame to the cabinet member for environment, development and transport:

"When will the consultation on regulating Sexual Entertainment Venues start, and where will this be advertised? What is the timescale for implementation?"

Councillor Stonard, cabinet member for environment, development and transport's response:

"The introduction of the sexual entertainment venues legislation by government allowed councils' to adopt the provisions of the Act without going out to public consultation.

Following a report to licensing committee on 13 September 2012 members agreed to adopt the provision of the Act, and having completed the statutory advertising, the provisions were adopted on 15 October 2012.

Officers are currently finalising the policy document and license conditions for member approval. I will ensure Council and Cllr Grahame are kept involved and informed."

In response to a supplementary question from **Councillor Grahame, Councillor Stonard** said that the current priority for the relevant officers was the early morning restriction order. He did not mean to imply in his written response that the council

would not undertake public consultation. Councillor Grahame should be rest assured that we would not do that.

Question 5

Councillor Haynes to ask the cabinet member for housing:

“Some tenants have been told that their window, kitchen and bathroom replacements will have to be re-done due to concerns about workmanship under a previous council contractor. In how many houses has this problem occurred?”

Councillor Bremner, cabinet member for housing’s response:

“During 2010 Connaught installed new windows in a number of our older properties without carrying out the structural repairs to the brickwork, and without consulting us on this omission.

Although only a very small number of these properties is now showing structural problems, with some opening casements starting to bend slightly. We have taken a decision to write to the tenants of all the potentially affected properties which number 627 and offer them replacements windows as a matter of course.

We will now carry out another structural survey in each of these properties and, with our new contractor, Anglian Windows; we will consult with tenants on how they wish to proceed. Where the tenant is happy with their current windows we will respect this and not replace them, but where they are not happy we will replace them.

We did not pay Connaught for original window replacement programme so this new work will be done at no additional cost to the council.

The above situation only applies to windows and no such replacement programme is being carried out for Kitchens and bathrooms.”

Question 6

Councillor Price to ask the cabinet member for environment, development and transport:

“At the highly successful and well attended stakeholders' meeting on 7 November, it was clearly identified that an introduction of an Early Morning Restriction Order (EMRO) in Norwich would go a long way towards mitigating the anti social behaviour in the Late Night Activity Zone (LANZ). As a member of the licensing committee, I was happy to see a recommendation adopted by full council in June and was equally disappointed to see it withdrawn after the close of the consultation period this autumn. As the same problems still exist in the LANZ, I am confident that this chamber would welcome as quickly as possible the amended EMRO proposal to be put before us and subsequently put out to public consultation. Can the cabinet member confirm exactly what is delaying this Order on which all councillors have previously voted in favour of consulting?”

Councillor Stonard, cabinet member for environment, development and transport's response:

"In a report to council on 25 June 2013 a revised proposal was submitted from the police to introduce three separate Early Morning Restriction Orders (EMROs).

Following approval from council the proposal was advertised for consultation which ran from 1 August to 13 September 2013. In reviewing the outcome of the consultation, the police felt the feedback highlighted some small issues that required further consideration.

In considering these factors, the council is taking the opportunity to close the current EMRO process and a report will go before licensing committee on 12 December. This will recommend that the current proposals for EMROs are terminated and that the licensing committee will reconvene in the New Year so members can consider amended proposals from the police for the management of the city's night time economy.

The timetable for this is currently being discussed with the police. Therefore, I can reassure council that there is a commitment to proceed with EMROs that have the support of the police and has regard to the outcome of the consultation process."

Councillor Price asked, as a supplementary question, if the cabinet member could confirm if there were any firm proposals from the police. **Councillor Stonard** said that he was due to meet with the police soon to hear whether they had any other proposals based on the consultation response. He emphasised that an EMRO was a way of managing new response to anti-social behaviour but was not a solution to anti-social behaviour. He was also looking at ways to address the primary concerns.

Question 7

Councillor Lubbock to ask the deputy leader of the council and cabinet member for resources:

"What was the value of the New Homes Bonus and how has it been spent over the last financial year 2013/14 and how does the administration propose to spend it in the next financial year?"

Councillor Waters, the deputy leader of the council and cabinet member for resources' response:

"The New Homes Bonus totals £1,613,367 in 2013/14.

The council does not allocate New Homes Bonus to specific services or schemes, but through the Medium Term Financial Strategy applies it in support of the priorities identified in the Corporate Plan.

The New Homes Bonus is a part of the council's overall financial resources, which fund the ongoing provision of services to residents as well as a range of strategic initiatives which will continue to bring benefits to the city and its residents."

Councillor Lubbock asked, as a supplementary question, if the cabinet member would consider using a quarter of this funding for one year only to introduce 20mph limits throughout the city. **Councillor Waters** re-emphasised that there was no separate pot of funding available. Any additional money received simply helped the council to deal with the ongoing shortfall. Proposals for how to allocate next year's budget would need to be discussed at budget council.

Question 8

Councillor Storie to ask the cabinet member for housing:

"Could the portfolio holder update the council once again regarding the impact upon Norwich families and individuals of the 'bedroom tax'? What steps are being taken to support those afflicted by this vicious tax?"

Councillor Bremner the cabinet member housing's response:

"The "Bedroom Tax" came into force from April 2013 and the latest statistics have been published regarding the total number of people affected.

It affects all tenants in social housing and the Housing Team have taken on the majority of the cases affected. There are smaller numbers of Housing Association (HA) tenants (152) and the various HA's are working directly with their tenants and assisted, where needed, by the Financial Inclusion Manager in the Council.

After six months (Sept 2013) 2360 (15%) council tenant households were having weekly deduction from their housing benefit in respect of the bedroom tax.

- 2012 have had a 1 bedroom deduction, average benefit loss £11.03 (14 % of their eligible rent). Total average annual benefit loss per household is £552.
- 348 have had a 2 bedroom or more deduction, average benefit loss of £20.74 (25% of their eligible rent). Total average annual benefit loss per household is £1036.
- The estimated total benefit loss is £29K per week £1.47m per year.

The housing service has not evicted anybody for bedroom tax arrears alone. There have been 15 evictions for rent arrears since April, only 3 had a bedroom tax element, but action was already in train before April.

Housing Income officers are working with tenants affected by the bedroom tax to prevent arrears from accruing or to help customers who have been unable to afford new rent levels with the intention of preventing legal action wherever possible. They have been maintaining contact with affected tenants and have been advising and assisting customers to complete discretionary housing payment application forms. They are also making referrals to our in-house team for specialist debt counselling or to our new budget advisers who offer a 'financial health check' and advice on making savings in every day spending. The budgeting advisers are also contacting affected tenants who do not have arrears to learn from them how they are coping and offer support in cases of hardship. In addition we have amended procedures which would have previously penalised re-housing applicants who had arrears in order to allow

priority levels to be maintained and for any arrears debts to be collected once a 'downsizing' move may have taken place.

The experience of the first 6 months is that 23% of tenants facing a benefit loss now have rent arrears but did not have rent arrears at the beginning of April. The increase of rent arrears between March and September for bedroom tax cases is (£60K). If extrapolated over the whole year (50 rent weeks) we can look to increased rent arrears of £111K (8% of the benefit loss).

The council provides discretionary housing benefit payments although there is a limited budget for this. This budget will be exhausted by the end of the financial year demonstrating the need for additional support for those affected by the "bedroom tax".

However the improving benefit assessment situation and good all round income collection performance by the income team shows that the arrears situation in Norwich is overall better than anticipated. That is not to say that individual are households are not considerably worse off and in many cases not coping."

Question 9

Councillor Harris to ask the leader of the council:

"Following the announcement earlier in the month that the city council had been awarded £228,000 for its 'Walk to' programme; can the Leader update the council on the likely benefits which will be delivered by the project?"

Councillor Arthur, leader of the council's response:

"This is yet another example of how the council, with its partners, has managed to unlock extra funding to invest in the health and wellbeing of Norwich citizens.

This project will sit alongside our cycling project to help :

- reduce health inequalities,
- encouraging people to shift to sustainable forms of transport and so reduce carbon emissions, traffic noise and congestion,
- make sure that our new cycling infrastructure is not to the detriment of pedestrians.

A project coordinator will work with the following organisations to deliver the outcomes:

1. Active Norfolk – run a programme of health walks targeted at the most inactive people. Utilising our parks and open spaces as a safe and pleasant environment to encourage walking as means of both transport and recreation (Target - 500 participants).
2. Liftshare – work with local businesses to raise employee's awareness of alternative modes of transport through 'Personal Travel Plans'. Provide

employees with options for bus, cycle, walking highlighting emissions, calories used, cost etc. (Target - 2,400 participants).

3. Intelligent Health – run an interactive walking challenge within Crome / Heartsease to stimulate behaviour change. Electronic tags on lampposts in the area are swiped with a personal card as you walk/cycle past. Your journey to school or work is then logged online and you can compare and compete with your classmates or colleagues (Target - 15,000 participants).

The coordinator will also have a delivery budget to ensure Norwich benefits from national walking initiatives while continually championing the health, financial and green benefits of choosing walking. (Target - 10,000 engaged)."

Question 10

Councillor Button to ask the leader of the council:

"Can the Leader update the Council on the housing improvements secured in Norwich due to the Energy Company Obligation? Would the removal of the ECO reduce the Council's endeavours to robustly tackle fuel poverty?"

Councillor Arthur, leader of the council's response:

"According to the Department of Energy and Climate Change, the ECO or Energy Company Obligation makes up 4% – or £47 – of an average annual energy bill. The scheme is about improving the energy efficiency of the homes of poorer people and pensioners. Its removal would stop thousand and thousands of homes nationally getting energy efficiency measures they need to keep their bills low.

The ECO is available until March 2015 and our own housing teams have been using it to work on our own hard to treat properties. To date we have completed 56 EWI (external wall insulations) and 8 IWI (internal wall insulations). The results have been very positive. For example one tenant said their energy bill had reduced by half. Our housing team hope to deliver 95 EWI and 18 IWI next financial year which is when the existing ECO fund ends. The removal of ECO would affect our capacity to work on hard to treat properties within our own housing stock.

Presently the council is procuring a Green Deal provider for the private sector housing stock. ECO funding would have made the Green Deal options more affordable to the vulnerable or people in hard to treat properties or for those on low incomes. We are all aware that the Green Deal has had a very slow start nationally. The National Insulation Association (NIA) warned on Thursday that the government's energy efficiency measures were "currently not delivering as expected by government with cavity wall installations 65% down and solid wall insulation over 70% down".

It is vital we use ECO funds to improve heating and insulation for our poorest citizens. We are all aware that fuel poverty is a real issue both nationally and in Norwich and it is well known that fuel poverty is a contributory factor to the UK's unenviable record of winter deaths.

The removal of ECO would increase costs to households who really need the measures and make a bad situation worse. These measures are needed to help the most vulnerable.

The council has an Affordable Warmth Strategy and Home Energy Conservation Act Report and we continue to carry out a range of work with our partners to address fuel poverty in the City.

We will also continue to support the national campaign to end fuel poverty by objecting to any detrimental changes in national energy efficiency policy including the removal of ECO."

Question 11

Councillor Barker to ask the leader of the council:

"Can the leader update the council on the likely benefits associated with the approval of the Joint Core Strategy for Greater Norwich? What are the anticipated benefits for Norwich in terms of regeneration, job creation and development?"

Councillor Arthur, leader of the council's response:

"The Joint Core Strategy (JCS) sets out a long term vision for Norwich and the surrounding area and strategic policies for shaping and steering development. As members will recall from our numerous previous debates it was adopted in March 2011 but was then subject to legal challenge. To cut a long story short this led to part of the JCS, dealing with major growth in the area of Broadland near to Norwich, needing to be reconsidered. This reconsideration took place leading to a Public Examination into the part JCS earlier this year. The report of the independent Inspector who undertook the Examination has now been published. His conclusion allows the councils to proceed to adopt the part JCS and ourselves, Broadland and South Norfolk will need to consider whether to do so. In Norwich Cabinet will be considering this matter in detail on 12 December following which Council will consider it.

Overall the JCS is a bold plan. It seeks to ensure that at least 37,000 additional homes and at least 27,000 additional jobs are created over the period up to 2026. Most of this growth will be focussed on the Norwich Urban Area and due to our tight administrative boundary significant growth will need to be delivered in both Broadland and South Norfolk Council areas.

The Inspector's report into the part JCS is welcome. This means that the councils' strategy for the distribution of growth over the Norwich Area has been endorsed. The major growth in Broadland fits into a coherent strategy which ensures that housing needs are addressed, economic development is promoted, the environment is protected and infrastructure investment is well coordinated with growth.

Crucially the adoption of the part JCS will provide certainty about the strategic framework. Not only does the JCS come about from close partnership working between the City, Broadland and South Norfolk Councils, it has been strongly supported by the county council with their strategic responsibility for transportation, education and economic development. It is supported by the Local Enterprise Partnership and most of the business community. Utilities providers have been involved throughout. The Broads

Authority, Natural England, and the Environment Agency are all comfortable that it protects and enhances the environment. It has now been endorsed at independent Examination twice.

It is this degree of consensus that is crucial. Having an agreed strategy endorsed by government enables infrastructure to be provided in a timely manner assisted by the revenues that will be raised following the introduction of the Community Infrastructure Levy earlier this year. This does not just mean the roads and sustainable transport measures. New and expanded schools, improved health and community facilities will be provided. New open spaces and sports pitches will be provided. The delivery of new green areas will link into the existing network improving biodiversity. Water and electricity companies base their planning on the JCS, major investment is planned in water supply, sewerage, electricity and broadband networks.

The benefits of having the JCS in terms of homes, jobs and regeneration are hard to quantify. My own hope is that they will be far in excess of the numbers that appear in the plan. But what is beyond doubt is that the benefits of having this particular agreed strategy are massive compared with the only other alternative available. That of not having any agreed strategy. Therefore as a council, I trust members will appreciate that we have moved on from the “what and where” of planning for development, to a focus on the “how and when” new jobs and homes will be delivered. Our aim is to maximise the benefit that development will provide for the people of Norwich now and into the future. “

Question 12

Councillor Brociek-Coulton to ask the cabinet member for environment, development and transport:

“Can the cabinet member for environment, development and transport advise the council on the likely benefits to the city relating to the success of the City Cycle Ambition? What steps will he take to ensure communities will be closely consulted?”

Councillor Stonard, cabinet member for environment, development and transport’s response:

“As a local authority involved in the City Deal process the city council was able to compete for capital funding from the Cycle Ambition initiative. The success of our application to the Department for Transport for £3.8m will result in numerous benefits for the city.

It will boost economic growth by enabling residents to reach job opportunities, city centre facilities and link major development sites to the cycle network. This is why the Norwich Research Park, UEA, the Business Improvement District and the Local Enterprise Partnership support the project.

It will tackle health problems in parts of the city with high levels of obesity by providing cycling infrastructure and cycling promotion. This is why the public health team at Norfolk County Council and the Clinical Commissioning Group are supporting it as part of the Healthy Norwich initiative.

It will contribute to the implementation of the Norwich Area Transport Strategy increasing the share of trips by bicycle, reducing the rate of accidents and cutting

carbon emissions from transport. This is why our colleagues at the county council are helping us to design and implement the project.

It demonstrates the value of being part of the City Deals process and is the fruit of strategic working with our neighbouring councils. It has also unlocked £228,000 of revenue funding to promote walking alongside cycling.

Our bold and ambitious vision for cycling infrastructure improvements has started to bring us national recognition. However, the most important thing is to implement the projects well so local people appreciate them.

Earlier today we held the first event to harvest the ideas and opinions of citizens and local organisations about the programme. It is the first of many opportunities for people to have their say about our plans. We recognise how important this communication is which is why we have used part of the funding to appoint a public engagement officer who will be dedicated to providing people with the information they need and will ensure that the designers and decision makers take stakeholders' views into account.

The result of our efforts will be an eight mile cross-city route that directly connects homes to important destinations and can be safely ridden by less experienced riders because the entire length is either separate from traffic or shares road space with traffic that travels at or below 20 mph. This will set a standard for the enhancement of the other pedalways that we aim to improve over the coming years."

In reply to a supplementary question from **Councillor Brociek-Coulton, Councillor Waters** said that individual wards would be consulted as the council was keen to involve the public as fully as possible and the council would be looking carefully at best practice advice.

Question 13

Councillor Maxwell to the leader of the council:

"Can the leader advise the council on her on-going steps to secure from the government the full scope of the City Deal for Norwich? If successful, what greater influence will the council have upon national programmes seeking to deliver investment in skills, jobs, infrastructure and housing for the city?"

Councillor Arthur, leader of the council's response:

"Over the past 12 months there have been extensive negotiations with Central Government over the form and nature of a deal. Along with the other leaders from Norfolk County Council, Broadland and South Norfolk District Councils and the Chair of the LEP I have devoted considerable time and energy to promote the case for a City Deal for Norwich. Throughout this period I have sought to ensure that the Greater Norwich deal has retained its focus around the essential building blocks for growth – a skilled workforce, support for business enterprise and innovation and appropriate infrastructure to accommodate growth in homes and jobs.

The government is seeking a step change in the economic performance of cities and in return they are prepared to consider additional freedom and flexibilities for local authorities to ensure growth is delivered. There is no 'new' government funding specifically allocated to City Deals but local authorities can seek to access or influence existing funding arrangements. Delivering the growth ambitions contained in the Joint Core Strategy has been a key consideration in the formulation of a City Deal for the area as well as ensuring that there is greater democratic accountability over key Central Government investment.

In December I will be reporting to cabinet that to date we have achieved considerable success from being involved in the City Deal process. The Government has not provided additional resources for this initiative. Instead they have directed City Deal authorities to compete for existing funding opportunities including funding ring-fenced for City Deal authorities only. The Greater Norwich authorities and LEP have made a positive response to these opportunities and have achieved considerable success as follows:

Skills: The skills component was agreed In October 2013 as part of a LEP wide proposal contained in the Greater Ipswich City deal.

Enterprise Innovation: We have submitted a £5.5m bid to BiS for a programme of business support initiatives. This LEP wide funding proposal was submitted in November 2013 and a decision is expected on this submission before the end of the calendar year. If approved this funding will provide a major change in the way support for existing and emerging businesses is provided in Greater Norwich.

Infrastructure: Approval of the infrastructure component for the City Deal is the most complicated and has involved a number of separate decisions. Our aim has been how we can secure funds to ensure that the infrastructure necessary to support growth is delivered in a timely manner. Achievements to date include:

- (1) In a competitive process, open to City Deal authorities only, Greater Norwich secured £3.72m for measures to promote cycling in the city.
- (2) In a competitive process, only open to authorities who had been awarded a Cycle Ambition Grant, Norwich secured £229k from the Department of Health to bring forward a two year programme of measures to increase the number of people walking in the city.
- (3) Norfolk County Council has secured DfT approval for a feasibility study of the A47. Only a few authorities have been invited to prepare a feasibility study and the City Deal has added weight to this achievement.
- (4) In November 2013, following a competitive process open to LEPs, the Greater Norwich secured Treasury approval to borrow £36.7m at a discounted Public Works Loan Board rate to provide finance to help meet the infrastructure funding gap. The loans will be repaid from developer and other income.
- (5) As part of the formal City Deal sign off a decision will be made on a request for a further £43.3m of discounted PWLB borrowing to provide additional support for investment in strategic and local infrastructure over the period to 2025.

It is clear that various bodies will be engaged with delivering the different components of the City Deal. For us a key part of managing the implementation

process and where we will have significant influence at a local level is the establishment of a Growth Board for Greater Norwich. The Board will be led by local authority and LEP representatives and will have the scope to include other key partners.

The constitutional arrangements for the Growth Board are still being formulated and will require cabinet approval. The remit of the Board is to provide a co-ordinated approach to the delivery of jobs, homes and infrastructure in Greater Norwich. In those areas where the Board shares this responsibility with other partners it will have influence by having representation on County and/or LEP wide delivery boards (for example for skills and business support). This is a level of democratic involvement that is not currently available.

In Greater Norwich we have a long and very successful track record of working together. In view of the changing, and, in some respects challenging landscape for funding economic development and infrastructure investment (particularly the growing role of Local Enterprise Partnerships) it is essential that we build on this foundation to help achieve our ambitious growth ambitions and to maintain a voice for the City of Norwich at every level. “

Question 14

Councillor Gayton to ask the cabinet member for resources:

“The Secretary of State for Education recently commented that families using food-banks “which mean that they are not best able to manage their finances”. Given the explosion of food-banks in Norwich, will the Cabinet Member condemn Mr Gove’s statement and update Council on the steps being taken to support vulnerable people?”

Councillor Waters, cabinet member for resources’ response:

“The Norwich Foodbank has operated within the City since October 2010 and since that date the need for their service has significantly increased in leaps and bounds. The latest figures show that in the second quarter of 2013/14 over 2500 people used the food banks. This is three times more than the number of people using the food banks in quarter 2 of 2011/12.

The Secretary of State for Education’s views are not echoed by the MP for Norwich North, Chloe Smith who said “Norwich Foodbank is an outstanding local charity. It helps hundreds of Norwich people in need of food every month. I cannot praise highly enough the dedication and drive of Foodbank’s volunteers every week in making this operation work simply and smoothly.”

Having operated since then, they have become increasingly aware that people can be vulnerable for a number of different reasons and that part of their role can be to act as a sign-posting agency to enable people to seek advice and help around a number of problems including but not restricted to debt, employment, benefits etc. They recently launched a website to highlight this and it contains links to a number of organisations that may be of assistance to individuals in crisis.

The city council supports the work of the Foodbank and indeed we are a referral agency for them. We have provided training for their volunteers and will be doing so again in the future. In the work recently carried out by the Council to up-date the local needs assessment for advice in the city, they are one of the key partners in moving this work forward.

Scrutiny committee received a report on welfare reform on 24 October and this lists a large number of actions taken by the council and also actions in conjunction with others. I have reproduced this list below:

The council has
Commissioned various projects including

Debt Advice (CAB),
Budgeting & free debt management (MABS),
Income Maximisation (Age UK Norwich
Tribunal Representation work (NCLS).

Its own Money Advice Team which includes Budget advisors to work closely with its tenants including additional staff resources in Housing engaged to tackle low level rent arrears and offer budget advice.

Rewritten the DHP policy and amended the decision making process to involve housing options staff

Contacted all council tenants affected by the under occupation changes in advance of the changes taking place. Over 1,200 questionnaires were completed which are providing data which are informing income strategies.

- Attempted to contact all those affected by the total benefit cap in advance of the changes, regardless of tenure. In some instances we were told by residents that this was before they heard anything from the Department of Work and Pensions
- Revised allocation procedures to avoid new tenants moving into under occupied properties and in some cases relaxed rules on moving with rent arrears to enable tenants to down size
- Implemented a new council tax reduction scheme which delivered the same level of reduction in bills to those previously supported under the national scheme
- Produced publicity and information on claiming unclaimed benefits and in particular working tax credits often unclaimed by households without children (the same leaflet also highlighted unclaimed pension credits)
- As part of broader channel shift work started work on trying to map community ICT facilities to support residents to manage their benefits online
- Become a Living Wage council to promote improved wages and a subsequent reliance upon state benefits to augment wages
- Worked with specific groups to raise awareness, including Bridge Plus, Deaf Connexions and Opening Doors

The council working with other agencies has for example:

- Worked with other registered providers to support tenancy swaps / exchanges for those affected by benefit changes
- Presented information to the Norwich Locality Board to spread awareness of some of the possible implications and share information with agencies such as the police, probation and health
- Worked with the Norfolk Safeguarding Children's Board to specifically consider impacts on vulnerable children and helped facilitate discussions on, for example, potential use of the pupil premium to support affected families through schools
- Worked with different voluntary agencies and registered providers to prevent homelessness and offer housing options to people in housing need.
- Run a number of council tenant and cross tenure drop in sessions with a range of agencies in attendance to offer support and guidance
- Working with DWP / Job Centre Plus to consider how to support vulnerable people in the lead up to Universal Credit (whenever that happens) through a "local support services framework"
- Continued our work to reduce fuel poverty in the City working with agencies from a number of sectors through activities such as Switch and Save.
- Supported a bid by Voluntary Norfolk and Age UK for limited short term funds to recruit volunteers to target energy saving and fuel bill reduction work amongst vulnerable groups (a decision on this bid is due mid-October)
- Worked with the library in The Forum to begin to understand the need for public internet access as benefit applications move toward "digital by default", particularly with UC
- Carried out joint welfare advice sessions with Equal Lives, who now also have a weekly drop in session within the Customer Contact Centre (not specifically on welfare reform, but able to pick up for example PIP / DLA appeals)
- Benchmarking with other social landlords to gauge success of income collection strategies
- Continued our financial inclusion programme working with different agencies from the voluntary and community sector on a number of activities such as the provision of debt and money advice."

Councillor Gayton asked, as a supplementary question, what the cabinet members views were on the increase in the use of food banks. **Councillor Waters** said that food banks were a barometer of social disaster. He welcomed the good work being done by volunteers who provided the food banks. However, he said they were not the solution to the main problem.

Question 15

Councillor Ackroyd to ask the cabinet member for environment, development and transport:

"There are a number of footpaths in Eaton especially around the Greenways area that have metal barriers across them to prevent motorised vehicles from using them.

However these barriers also prevent those who use wheelchairs from using them.

Having brought this to the attention of the council we are told that those disabled people wanting equal access will have to wait until the next financial year to see the removal of these barriers.

Please will the portfolio holder comment on this unjust state of affairs?"

Councillor Stonard, cabinet member for environment, development and transport's response:

"The barriers referred to by Councillor Ackroyd have been in place for several years. My understanding is that they were erected to prevent the use of these footpaths by motorcycles, mopeds and scooters, which has been an issue in Eaton in the past.

The difficulties they present for wheelchair users was brought to officers attention at the end of October and six locations have been found where the problem exists. There is a budget for making minor amendments to highway infrastructure to deal with such problems; however, it is already fully committed for this financial year. With no funds available the plan is therefore to undertake the works in early 2014/15.

Complete removal of the barriers is one option however it could lead to use of the paths by motorcycles, mopeds and scooters again. Therefore a revised barrier that continues to deter this but also makes it convenient for wheelchair users will be explored."

Question 16

Councillor Wright to ask the cabinet member for environment, development and transport:

"Could the portfolio holder with responsibility for housing please let me know how many residential buildings, in whatever state of repair, have been empty for 1, 5 and 10 years and of the figures provided, for how many of those properties is the council actively working to seek out owners in order to bring them back into use as homes?"

Councillor Stonard, cabinet member for environment, development and transport's response:

"The current figure for all empty homes in the city is 1461.

Of these, 1247 are empty for no stated reason. The remaining 214 are empty for a specific reason which make them exempt from action by the council. Such reasons

include extensive refurbishment, those subject to probate and dwellings where a prohibition or closing order is in force.

We are unable to provide the figures for homes that have been empty for more than 5 or 10 years. However, the current break-down for homes that are empty for no exempt reason is as follows:

- Empty for up to 1 month: 189
- Empty between 1 and 6 months: 661
- Empty between 7 and 24 months: 276
- Empty for over 2 years: 121

Many of the homes that are empty between 1 and 6 months will come back in to use without intervention as part of the natural functioning of the property market e.g. as house sales are completed or as private landlords find tenants etc. However, the owner of every property that has no genuine reason for being empty has been contacted either by the private sector housing team, council tax officers or as part of a recent council project involving an external agency that specialises in empty homes work.

There is no longer any council-tax incentive to keep properties empty since the empty homes discount has now been removed for any that are empty for more than 1 month. All properties that are empty for more than two years also now have to pay council tax at 150% of the normal rate which is a strong incentive for owners to bring them back in to use.

Recent work by the council to tackle longer term empty properties (those over 6 months) has been very successful. In the first six months of this financial year 135 long term empty properties have become occupied and are now registered for council tax as a result of council activity.

All the remaining properties that have been empty for over six months are being tackled directly by the private sector housing team through the use of advice, incentives and enforcement powers, including compulsory purchase, where appropriate”