



NORWICH
City Council

COUNCIL

20 October 2009

Questions to Executive Members and Committee Chairs

Question 1

Councillor Andrew Wiltshire to the Executive Member for Sustainable City Development:-

“Could the Executive Member please tell me what research and consideration was given to air quality and CO2 emission changes that may take place as a result of extending 20mph zones? How will the council monitor this in future?”

Councillor Brian Morrey, Executive Member for Sustainable City Development's reply:-

“The relationship between traffic speed and air quality and carbon dioxide emissions is complex. At high speeds, there is good evidence that speed reduction will improve air quality. However, at lower speeds emissions are governed by a variety of factors, particularly driver behaviour and road layout, which make forecasts difficult.

Some authors have concluded that low speed limits may lead to an increase in air pollution and carbon dioxide emissions. For instance this is because; road humps or other features often associated with 20 mph speed limits may increase acceleration and deceleration. However, the Government's Traffic and Air Quality Management Research programme has revealed no overall deterioration in air quality because of speed reductions where speeds are already low.

The council is mindful of potential adverse effects on air quality and carbon dioxide emissions due to 20 mph zones. Direct monitoring is generally impractical on cost grounds. There has been some roadside monitoring of Castle Meadow, which has a 20 mph speed limit and traffic calming features. However, this was done to measure the effect of a low emission zone¹ and therefore it provides little evidence of any effects due to the speed limit and traffic calming.

Reliance is therefore placed on research findings and good design. In particular, if traffic calming is to be introduced, it needs to be designed to discourage high levels of acceleration and deceleration between features. For example, it is important that traffic calming is regularly spaced and is not too far apart. Also any potential for adverse effects on air pollution or carbon dioxide need to be set against the accident benefits of traffic calming; well designed schemes have been shown to reduce casualty rates by typically over 60%.

¹ The LEZ includes low emission buses, engine switch-off when stopped and eco-driving
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The council is presently piloting the use of speed limits alone to reduce speeding traffic in residential areas. As this relies on signage only the potentially detrimental effect of traffic calming would therefore be avoided. Monitoring of the pilot schemes indicates that speed reduction has only been modest although there is some evidence that more people are walking or cycling both of which would have a positive effect on air pollution and carbon dioxide emissions.”

Question 2

Councillor Antony Little to the Leader of the Council:-

“I understand that in the light of the expenses scandal that rocked parliament earlier this year the Leader of the Council now proposes to bring the report of the independent panel in to members allowances to council as part of the budget consideration. Although I would prefer to see this settled sooner I understand the logic. Does the Leader of the Council agree with me that the Group Leaders of the 4 main parties ought to take a personal lead on this issue given the current political climate and budget situation?

In deferring the consideration, the Leader of the Council, the Leader of the Lib Dem Group and the Leader of the Conservative Groups are taking cuts in their allowances whilst the Leader of the Opposition will continue to be paid more under the old system than the new one. Does the Leader of the Council agree with me that the city will feel this is unfair given the financial position we face and would he further join me in suggesting to the Leader of the Opposition that it would be a timely gesture to sacrifice the difference between his allowances now and the amount recommended by the independent panel to prove that we are all in this together?”

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

“Discussions between the group leaders are still continuing about how to best deal with this thorny issue although it is true I currently favour considering councillors allowances alongside the other budget issues so that our allowances can be weighted alongside the other difficult financial issues facing the council. I think most councillors share the anger at the way some MPs have behaved, but also resent the fact that the conduct of those MPs has tarnished the reputation of local politicians. The fact things are within the rules does not necessarily make them right.

The Leader of the Opposition is entitled to claim the current level of allowances within the existing scheme even though it is higher than the independent panel feels appropriate, is the highest allowances claimed by any member of the council - including the Leader of the Council. The delay in implementing the recommendations of the independent panel means, as Councillor Little points out; all other group leaders are in effect accepting cuts. I think it is for the Leader of the Opposition to explain his position if he sees fit.”

Question 3

Councillor Samir Jeraj to the Executive Member for Community Safety and Community Cohesion:-

“Norfolk Constabulary announced in August that it is intending to leave its offices at Bethel Street and move to a new building on the outskirts of the City. What is the position of Norwich City Council regarding this change?”

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

“The Norfolk Police’s long term strategy has been reviewed to reflect the changes to policing in Norfolk, which includes the roll out of Safer Neighbourhood Teams, and I am certain we all recognise what a great success the Safer Neighbourhood Teams have been.

The strategy recognises the needs and differences of strategic and neighbourhood policing and the buildings they need. As well as improvements to neighbourhood policing bases, the strategy also proposes a move out of Bethel Street as the building does not meet modern working and operational needs. An example of the changes planned is a new safer neighbourhood team base built on the site of the highly over-crowded Earlham Road Station.

Bethel Street itself serves a number of different policing teams, most of whom serve the area of Greater Norwich, or beyond. Moving to the 'outskirts' of the City relates to the police "response hub" which has a role that is wider than the City Council area.

It is planned to maintain the operational policing that relates to the Norwich City Council area and Safer Neighbourhood Teams within the city centre and as close to the city centre as possible. Therefore there will still be "Police" within the city centre and this will include policing staff in more accessible locations. How helpful it would be to have Police bases accessible to the public close to Gentlemen’s Walk and Prince of Wales Road to give just two examples of suggestions of places to put the new “stations”.

It is misleading to equate quality of service with buildings. It is for the police to decide how they meet their operational needs and commitment as part of the partnership of agencies that delivers services to the city. We have close and developing relationships with the police and in that spirit will continue to look at how we can strengthen our shared commitment to keep people feeling safe in their homes and on the streets of the city.

As long as the changes improve accessibility to the public and result in further improvements to performance, and all analysis of the changes says that will happen, then it is only sensible to support them.”

Question 4

Councillor Peter Offord to the Executive Member for Sustainable City Development:-

"It is now over two years since residents moved out of the now derelict flats on Barrack Street. There have been problems with the flats recently, such as fly-tipping and vandalism. What action is the Council taking to ensure that they are demolished and that development takes place?"

Councillor Brian Morrey, Executive Member for Sustainable City Development's reply:-

"As you may know from today's announcement, Jarrolds has now purchased this site. We understand that they intend to demolish the buildings and will work with them to achieve this.

I would like to put on record my thanks to the Leader for his behind the scenes persuasion with the relevant parties that has now got us to the point of resolving this issue"

Question 5

Councillor Adrian Holmes to the Executive Member for Housing and Adult Services:-

"Residents have informed me of a number of cases where maintenance has been required on their Council houses, but the Council has told the tenants that, due to financial constraints, work can only be done when the same maintenance is required of a large number of houses in the area. Under what circumstances can a tenant expect repairs to be done promptly and when needed rather than being left until there is a programme of improvements in the area?"

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

"The majority of responsive type repairs will be carried out within the timescales outlined within the 'Responsive Maintenance Policy' and the service standard and certainly all emergency and urgent repairs will be attended to within the specified timescales.

In line with the policy where work which is classified as being of a 'non-urgent' or 'long term' nature is requested then the council will consider whether there are planned programmes of work that are imminent or if the work will wait until a planned programme can be drafted that could be classed as preventative maintenance. This may mean that as resources become available a preventative approach is taken. For example if it fits in our planned work we may well replace all ball valves to properties within a block rather than sending an operative to replace each ball valve one by one as they fail. However should the condition of an item requiring repair deteriorate then the necessary repair work will be carried out straight away.

Clearly carrying out work in a planned manner is far more cost effective and efficient. Indeed this approach fits with the Audit Commission recommendations on responsive repairs.

However if this question relates to specific enquiry I would suggest that Councillor Holmes raises it through the councillor enquiry system.”

Question 6

Councillor Ruth Makoff to the Executive Member for Corporate Resources and Governance:-

“Norwich City Council currently only offers residents paying council tax by cash or cheque one monthly payment date, the first of the month, as opposed to those paying by direct debit who have a choice of four different dates in the month. Given the economic situation (which makes finances tighter for residents and makes it even more important that the City Council collects council tax effectively), does the Executive member agree that the Council should be making it as easy as possible for Norwich residents to pay their council tax and be more flexible with payment dates?”

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

“Direct debit is an efficient and economical method of collecting council tax. Payment is guaranteed and the cost is less than any other method. We can pass the benefits of the lower costs to our customers, who choose to use direct debit, by giving them the choice of payment date.

Payments by cash or cheque are costly for the authority and not guaranteed. We ask for payment on the 1st of the month so we can follow up any missed payments promptly.”

Question 7

Councillor Howard Jago to the Executive Member for Housing and Adult Services:-

“Can Norwich City Council take action to revoke the leases on properties sold under the 'right to buy' scheme if the leaseholder persistently houses tenants who have a detrimental effect on their fellow residents?”

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

“All Norwich City Council right to buy leases contain a clause which states that the leaseholder must not permit any illegal or immoral act, or anything which may be or become a nuisance or annoyance, or cause damage to the Council or the owners or occupiers of the other flats on the Estate and any neighbouring premises.

Failure to adhere to the conditions can ultimately result in forfeiture of the lease i.e. ownership reverts back to the landlord with no compensation. Such cases are very rare locally or indeed nationally.

If the tenants of a leaseholder are causing nuisance to their neighbours then council officers will seek to work with the landlord to resolve the situation as it is the landlord that has responsibility for the property. Depending on the type and level of nuisance advice, and ultimately enforcement action, will be taken by the appropriate council service that is housing, community services or legal and democratic services.

If Councillor Jago requires more details then I would suggest he contacts Phillip Hyde, Head of Legal, Regulatory and Democratic Services who can provide more information about the law.”

Question 8

Councillor Bob Gledhill to the Executive Member for Corporate Resources and Governance:-

“I am aware that Council officers have a system of shared folders that (amongst other advantages) reduces the need to send large attachments by internal email. What is the Council doing to minimise the need for Council officers and Councillors to send and receive large attachments (both internally and externally) and does the Executive member consider there are money and energy savings to be made in this area?”

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

“The shared folders are set up for working papers, drafts and documents for internal use by staff. Documents sent by staff to external organisations are sent by email attachment unless of course the information is available on the Council website in which case a link can be sent.

I’m not aware of any money or energy savings potential.

I am surprised that Councillor Gledhill needs to ask what we have done for councillors. Some time ago we set up e-Councillor and officers place information, details of briefings, etc, there, rather than sending 39 messages with attachments. When sending information to one councillor or a small number of councillors, however, it will be necessary to send attachments, if the information is too great to include in the body of the email itself.”

Question 9

Councillor Stephen Little to the Executive Member for Residents and Customer Care:-

“Has the Executive considered having a member of staff stationed near the entrance to the Rates Hall in order to "meet and greet" residents and point them in the right direction? This could make things more accessible, especially for residents who are

more likely to find the experience difficult or confusing or for people with mental or physical disabilities. I have noticed that this seems to be standard practice in other places such as banks and the job centre.”

Councillor Julie Brociek-Coulton, Executive Member for Residents and Customer Care’s reply:-

“Customer contact have considered having a customer advisor meeting and greeting customers in the contact centre, and have carried out a short trial during a busy period. An improvement plan for face to face enquiries is in place and is due to be completed by the end of December 2009. The practical issues raised by the trial are being addressed as part of the improvement plan for face to face enquiries, including the potential cost of employing another resource in this current budget situation.

The programme has been influenced as a result of feedback from our customers and incorporates a number of ‘quick wins’ including the use of additional resources which are being funded for a year by the Department of Work and Pensions to help meet the demand of our benefit claimants.

The programme will be closely monitored for improvements in a number of areas including wait times and accessibility. Understanding how customers feel as a result of these improvements will be captured through the regular customer satisfaction surveys which are undertaken once a quarter or via ad hoc individual surveys.”

Question 10

Councillor Tom Dylan to the Executive Member for Corporate Resources and Governance:-

“The Government is currently consulting on the Housing Revenue Account, the national accounting mechanism that funds council housing. Can the Executive member provide the Council with an outline of what Norwich City Council's response to this consultation will be?”

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

“The draft of the proposed response was seen by members of the Citywide Board at their meeting last week and they agreed that our response should be submitted.

The Executive agenda which was published today includes a report outlining the draft response and Councillor Dylan can access this on e-Councillor or the Council’s website. The Executive will discuss this at their meeting on 28 October 2009 when a formal response will be agreed. If having read the proposed response Councillor Dylan, or indeed any other councillor, has any comments to make I will of course be pleased to hear them ideally in advance of the Executive meeting so that they can be considered.”

Question 11

Councillor Janet Bearman to the Executive Member for Residents and Customer Care:-

“What is the Executive's attitude towards "guerilla gardening" in Norwich?”

Councillor Julie Brociek-Coulton, Executive Member for Residents and Customer Care's reply:-

“The term guerrilla gardening is applied loosely to describe different forms of radical gardening.

It generally takes place on land that is perceived as neglected or derelict and occurs particularly in urban areas.

Some guerrilla gardeners carry out their actions at night in almost a secret approach, sowing and tending a new vegetable patch or flower garden. Others work more openly, actively seeking to engage with members of the local community.

The earliest record of guerrilla gardening took place in New York, when a derelict area of land was turned into a garden. The space is still cared for by volunteers and is protected by the local council.

As a principle, the Executive would not condone guerrilla gardening taking place in the form of direct action if it did not have the approval of the landowner. As a City, Norwich does not contain significant areas of derelict land so if it did occur it might have a significant impact on grounds maintenance, underground services or the overall city landscape.

However, some of the more recent examples of “planned guerilla gardening” if undertaken with the consent of landowners or public agencies could have significant opportunities in the City.

Whilst I would not describe the following example as guerilla gardening, a community group has started to develop a community garden on a piece of Council land close to Grapes Hill with the support of the Council's community engagement and landscape teams. The group has taken on a lease of the site and has successfully raised funds from the Councils' community participation fund as well as external grant programmes.

This is a wonderful example how communities can be empowered to make positive changes to their neighbourhood and approach that the Executive and Council should support.

I would be pleased to hear from any community groups or groups of neighbours that would like to take over any suitable areas or responsibility for tending communal growing spaces around estates. We would very much like to see the growth of that sort of community initiative but it should be done in collaboration with the Council to make sure potential problems are overcome before people expend time and money on something that might lead to problems.”

Question 12

Councillor Tom Llewellyn to the Executive Member for Corporate Resources and Governance:-

"It has been widely publicised that the Council has faced a bill in order to fund extra pension contributions arising as a result of a gap in the existing CityCare contract. Is this being funded through the General Fund, the Housing Revenue Account or proportionately according to the departments of the affected employees?"

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

"The extra payments are for the past service liability, that is for service up to 31 March 2000, of former City Council employees who transferred across to CityCare when the contract started. The costs will be allocated to the General Fund and Housing Revenue Account in proportion to the pension contributions made by all employees in the General Fund and Housing Revenue Account. The effect of this was to add an extra 1% on to the Council's employers pension contribution. This will create an additional cost the approximately an extra £200,000 in 2010/11. The Council's total employers contribution being 21% for 2010/11. The 2011/12 contribution rate will be subject to the triennial revenue and at this stage it is not possible project the results of this."

Question 13

Councillor Claire Stephenson to the Executive Member for Residents and Customer Care:-

"A resident of Nelson ward recently moved house and reported a change of address, for Council Tax collection purposes, to the Council. It was over two months before they received their bill at their new address, during which time they were sent reminders at their old address. Given the problems of the delay in revenue for the Council that such a situation brings about, and the waste involved in sending out unnecessary letters, can you tell me the average time it takes to process notifications of change of address and what is being done to speed this process up?"

Councillor Julie Brociek-Coulton, Executive Member for Residents and Customer Care's reply:-

"When a resident moves house within the city we always recommend that they continue to make payments until a new bill is received."

In the last 6 months there has been an increase in the level of activity for moves within, out of and into the city. This has caused the change around time for move in addresses to be extended to 8 weeks, due to the increased workload for the members of the revenues team.

We are currently reviewing the processes in revenues to see if we can handle this increase to the workload without having to increase staffing levels."

Question 14

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

"At the end of last week, local residents noted that the CCTV camera at the shops in Clover Hill had been removed. We were told that it would be back within 2 weeks but it has been gone longer than that. Could the Executive Member please tell me why the CCTV was taken down, when it will be put back up and why there has been a delay? After all the trouble that the community went to for this important community safety project we need it working all the time."

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

"Thank you for this question but you inadvertently missed out some words so I am adding them in. "After all the trouble the previous Labour Councillor Brenda Ferris, the Labour administration and the community went to get this important community safety project we need it working all the time." For some reason you missed out praising Labour Councillor Brenda Ferris and the Labour Council.

The camera has had two issues. The first problem was that it caused noise and vibration through the wall to the adjoining flat when it moved. I spoke to one of the flat residents some time ago and they had explained the problem then. Whatever its success, and it certainly has been a success, it was totally unfair to make the residents of the flat suffer. Another problem with that site was that later vegetation growth reduced its ability to view the whole area properly. So for those two reasons it had to be moved.

The camera is being relocated onto the new lamp column that has been installed, and we are waiting for the electrical socket to be fitted. This work is undertaken by County and an order has been placed.

As soon as the socket is installed the camera will be refitted. County have the order for this and have advised it should be in place next week."

Question 15

Councillor John Fisher to the Executive Member for Sustainable City Development-

"Has the City made any financial contribution to the £9.6m that has already been spent on the NDR research phase?"

Councillor Brian Morrey, Executive Member for Sustainable City Development's reply-

"The Council has made no direct financial contribution to the £9.6 million spent on the NDR proposal. Officers have spent some very small amounts of time contributing to the County Council's gateway review processes. I understand that

the gateway reviews involved a variety of key stakeholders including the other Greater Norwich Development Partnership councils”

Question 16

Councillor Rosalind Wright to the Executive Member for Corporate Resources and Governance:-

"Could the Executive Member please indicate whether the City Council routinely blanks names when processing applications for city council employment and whether it also removes any indication of gender?"

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

"The Council's application form asks for last name and initial. The equal opportunities monitoring form, which contains the information regarding gender, is separated from the application form before the short listing process, in line with Equal Opportunities guidelines."

Question 17

Councillor David Fairbairn to the Executive Member for Corporate Resources and Governance:-

"At the Council meeting of 24 February this year, we were advised that a prudent level of general reserves was £4.5418 million. This figure was obtained after a risk assessment exercise had been undertaken. Does that level of reserves still apply now, and if not, can the Executive Member explain why not?"

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

"The level approved on 24 February 2009 will apply until the Council sets an updated level in the 2010/11 budget-setting process on 23 February 2010.

The Council sets the prudent level of reserves, on the advice of the Chief Financial Officer, annually during the budget-setting process. During the course of the year, the impact of internal decisions and external factors on the risk profile is monitored and reviewed through the corporate risk management system, budget monitoring reports, and Medium Term Financial Strategy, in order to ensure compliance with the prudent level and to inform the annual update.

The Chief Financial Officer's advice is based on a risk assessment undertaken to determine the level of general reserves required by the Council. In making a recommendation for the level of reserves compliant with sections 32, 43 and 93 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 and section 25 of the Local Government Act 2003, the Head of Finance has followed guidance in the CIPFA LAAP Bulletin 77 – Guidance notes on Local Authorities."

Question 18

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

"Anti social behaviour comes in many forms from abusive neighbours to noisy scooters. There is no doubt that the ability to deal effectively and efficiently with anti social behaviour is one of the most pressing priorities for the public, the police and the council. Yet there is evidence of under reporting in this area, perhaps through confusion about who and when to contact the varying organisations or perhaps because of lack of confidence that anything will be done.

Given that there are a number of different bodies working to tackle anti social behaviour - Safer Neighbourhood Teams, Police Community Support Officers, Council Wardens, Council's Abate Team and Councillors - and a number of different ways of reporting anti social behaviour please can the Portfolio Holder tell me how all these bodies are co-ordinated and how they communicate with one another?"

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

"There has been a massive success in relation to ASB in Norwich and here are the figures for that massive success.

The key satisfaction measure for this work to reduce antisocial behaviour is included within the national indicator set as NI17. This is measured every two years and the percentage of residents who considered that anti-social behaviour was a problem improved from a low of 38% (2003/4) under the Lib Dem administration to 23% (2006/7) which was the first full year of the Labour administration, and our really positive support for the Community Wardens. The 2008/9 place survey showed even more continued improvement in performance to 19.9%. That means that the public's perception of Anti-Social Behaviour has halved, from nearly 40% to less than 20%. That is a stunning success and I want to record my thanks to all those involved in the City Council, the Police, and all other agencies. And there has been no under-reporting in that survey!

All reports of Anti Social Behaviour (ASB) made to the Council are recorded on a single workflow system – Civica (Comino) so that all the Council departments mentioned are working together from the same information, and using the same processes.

The Council's community safety manager has oversight of the linkages between council services and of partnership working with police and other agencies such as the youth offending team and fire service.

The coordination between the police and council on ASB issues takes place at a number of different levels. The council's community safety manager and community safety team are co-located with police colleagues to enable productive day to day contact and joint working.

Officers and in some areas members as well as Police are represented at Safer Neighbourhood Action Panel (SNAP) meetings where the community are invited to be involved in the setting of local operational priorities for the Police and partners (including the Council). The majority of those priorities are ASB related.

There is a monthly partnership tasking and coordination meeting where senior staff from the police, city council and other partner agencies meet under the umbrella of the Safer Norwich Partnership, to consider the analysis of police, council, fire service and other agencies crime and disorder data to agree joint approaches and interventions to address these issues.

The Safer Norwich Partnership jointly fund and employ staff who undertake specific roles. This includes:

- an ASB analyst to assist in analysing ASB data reported to all partners and acting on trends and peaks in hotspots
- an acceptable behaviour contract worker who ensures that the use of ABCs and other preventative tools in tackling youth ASB are coordinated across agencies

There is a joint operational protocol which governs this work to ensure that the issuing, monitoring and enforcement of such agreements is coordinated across the agencies.

Operational staff in both organisations, which includes neighbourhood wardens, police community support officers, ASB case officers and neighbourhood housing officers, work together at an operational level on a daily basis, undertaking joint visits, problem solving local issues and cases and sharing information.

Therefore I can assure the Council that there is no confusion in City Hall or the Police, and I hope Councillor Lubbock is not seeking to undermine the success of the work that is being put in, by all the agencies including the Police Safer Neighbourhood Teams, by our own Community Wardens, and Community Safety Team. It is interesting that some people by their constant griping and constant negativity are clearly trying to demoralise the staff involved but I am certain Councillor Lubbock is not one of those.

There is no doubt there will be some under reporting of Anti-Social Behaviour and Criminal damage and we will all have experience of residents who have spoken of problems but have not reported them, or have a continuing problem but feel that reporting it once is enough. We can all help in this situation by spelling out the need to tell the Police, the Police Community Support Officers, and the Community Wardens what is happening. The Police cannot know what is happening unless they are told – we are their eyes and ears. In your newsletters tell residents to ring and report it to the police - 0845 456 4567 or ring the ASB hotline – 212100. I have the ASB Hotline number on the bottom of my Councillor Card.

The reality is that people have more and more confidence in the fact that Anti-Social Behaviour is being taken very seriously and partners are cooperating and being successful in tackling it.

The evidence is that the approach not only works it has been a massive success. I think it's about time we all said well done."

Question 19

Councillor Brian Watkins to the Executive Member for Corporate Resources and Governance:-

"I understand that the Government has decided to remove the requirement for eligible small businesses to reapply for small business tax relief on an annual basis. This is clearly welcome news in so much as it will maximise take-up of the relief, as well as reducing bureaucracy and costs to both small businesses and local authorities.

Could the Executive member for Corporate Resources please give an indication about the current level of take-up in the city council area, and what the council can do to raise awareness of this change amongst eligible small businesses."

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

"There are currently around 1200 businesses who receive small business rate relief (SBRR) (value £1,046,249).

The Business Rates team proactively discuss SBRR with any business that contacts us and there is information about SBRR with each bill that is sent."

Question 20

Councillor Jeremy Hooke to the Executive Member for Corporate Resources and Governance:-

"Does Norwich City Council perform any credit searches on members of the public?"

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

"The City Council does undertake credit searches on members of the public. Examples of these are:

Service Area	Type of Client	Type of Activity / Transactions with Client	Company for Search used	Why Credit Search is undertaken
Revenues	Council tax payer Business rates payer	Investigations	Experian UK Data	To check for a forwarding address or do a full financial check if considering bankruptcy/committal action To check on details of directors

Service Area	Type of Client	Type of Activity / Transactions with Client	Company for Search used	Why Credit Search is undertaken
Benefits	Benefit claimant with overpayment	Finding details of current address	Experian	To recover benefit overpayment
Strategic Housing	Leasing Clients – includes individuals	Private Sector Leasing	Experian	For forwarding addresses to be able to send out bills for former tenancy arrears, repairs and recharges.
Housing options	Homeless applicants	Investigations/various	Experian	To verify circumstances surrounding homelessness (previous addresses, housing history etc)
Exchequer Management	Various – where mail is returned not being able to deliver to. Includes individuals as well as companies.	Various	Experian	To gain a forwarding addresses to be able to send Exchequer billing and general communications and debt collection.
Audit (Fraud)	Benefit Fraud cases	Investigations	National Anti Fraud Network (Experian or Equifax)	Various pieces of information to establish financial links, undeclared accounts, etc.

Question 21

Councillor Joyce Divers to the Executive Member for Corporate Resources and Governance:-

"In September last year, Councillor Waters promised council "significant improvements in Council Tax debt recovery performance by the end of this financial year." Could he therefore explain why, according to figures produced by the GMB Union, this council currently has £1.2 million in uncollected council tax and business rates?"

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

"The current figure of £1.2 million is an £800,000 reduction from the level at the start of the year. This refers to the total amount of Council Tax and, therefore, includes

both the County and Police precepts. The City Council receives approximately 15% of this amount.

For Council Tax collection as at September 2009 the level of collection had improved over the same period in the previous year despite the difficulties caused by the recession.

The target figure for the half year was 55.90% collected achieved is 56.03%. We would expect to be able to collect 99% + of our Council Tax although this extends beyond the 12 month budget period and is consequently reflected in future years as a Council Tax surplus, which used in setting Council Tax. For the 2009/10 Budget this surplus was £187,000 2.1% of Council Tax

Although the Council collects Business Rates, these are then passed on to the Government who then pay back an amount to the Council (which is less than the amount collected in the case of Norwich City Council)

Business rates collection has also been affected by the businesses ability to pay. The government introduced a deferral scheme in July 2009 to mitigate this."

Question 22

Councillor Susan Sands to the Leader of the Council:-

"Could the Leader of the Council update on the progress made on refurbishing the war memorial and inform council what provisions were being made for Remembrance Sunday?"

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

"The work on the war memorial and memorial gardens has now started. As things progress updates will be posted on the Council's website. There is a lot of interest in how things are progressing and we will do what we can to keep the City informed. Already St Peters Street has been made one way to accommodate the narrowing of the carriageway to facilitate the work and the shuttering erected that will soon have information and images posted on them.

The next major step is the removal of the memorial itself to be taken away for restoration work. RG Carters are planning to start the removal of the Lutyens Memorial from Monday 19th October – this week. They have allowed for a week to do this.

A specialist stone mason Fairhaven & Woods will carry out the work, under the watchful eye of conservation. Contained within the Memorial is a copper tube containing the list of 'the fallen soldiers'. If all goes well it should occur on Wednesday or Thursday. I hope by the time we get to council I will have an exact day and time the copper tube and names of the fallen will be removed to be placed in to the care of David Harvey at the Castle Museum as required and agreed in one of the planning and listed building conditions.

The Remembrance Day service for this year will take place in front of City Hall steps, commencing at 10.30 when the Norwich Citadel Band will lead the parade round from Bethel Street.

The wreaths will be placed on the front of city hall steps. A low level platform has been constructed to cover the lower three step levels of the central portion of the front steps. This will be covered in green material, and it will have planting along the top edge.

The Principal standard bearers and the Sword and Mace bearers will stand just behind the planting. The standard bearers will stand either side of the steps. The clergy will stand to the left of the steps as you look at city hall. The civic procession and wreath layers will stand to the right, together with public and parading veterans. Public viewing will be slightly more restricted this year because of the memorial garden works, but public viewing will be available behind the temporary contract barriers placed on St. Peter Street, on part of the pavement on the city hall side of St. Peter Street, pavements across from the forum, and on Gaol Hill.

The wreaths will be left on the front of city hall steps for a period of approximately one hour after the parade marches off to enable members of the public to lay their wreaths.

The service outside City Hall will be followed by a Remembrance Service in Norwich Cathedral at 11.40 a.m. The City Hall steps are being blessed by Rev Peter Nokes on 28 October to enable the wreaths to be laid upon them.

The Civic office has made these arrangements in detailed consultations with the veteran associations.

Now work is firmly underway we are starting to consider the time when the work will be finished and how to mark the occasion.

This work should mean the memorial gardens will be sound and a place of remembrance, reflection and pride for decades to come without further major works. However, I am sure Council will also join me in wishing to find a way of ensuring that in the future the City never has to go through the traumas that have accompanied the overlong build up to this project. We are also investigating how long term provision might be made to provide for any necessary work in the future and I will report to council on this in due course."